

## Air Weapons Campaign Leads To Tighter Restrictions

**Local MP Paul Holmes hailed David Blunkett's announcement that tough new air weapons laws will be introduced as a welcome step in the campaign against the increase in gun crime.**

Earlier today the Home Secretary announced that it will be illegal to carry air weapons in public and that the age limit for acquiring and using an air weapon without adult supervision will be increased from 14 to 17. Home Secretary David Blunkett said: *"We are determined to tackle gun crime. Our guns laws are already among the tightest in the world, and these new controls will help the police to deal effectively with anyone misusing replica weapons or airguns. Our crackdown on airguns is part of the government's wider commitment to tackle the anti social behaviour which blights some of our most vulnerable communities and breeds a fear of crime."* The announcement follows a lengthy cross party campaign supported by local MP Paul Holmes to increase the age limit and require adult supervision, with Paul sponsoring a Bill in October 2002 calling for more stringent rules over the availability of air weapons. This has culminated in the Home Secretary announcing tighter controls. Paul said, *"I am delighted this campaign has ended in success as this will undoubtedly reduce the huge numbers of incidents relating to air weapon misuse. Several people have lost their lives in the past 12 months, 1 in 10 air weapon attacks result in hospitalisation and hundreds of animals are injured every year. This trend will now be reversed by the Government's commendable action."*

12th Jan 2003

## Scandal of Labour Housing Policy

For the last five years it has been Labour Government policy to prevent Councils building houses - even where as in Chesterfield there is a great need such as for Old Age Pensioners bungalows. Yet Chesterfield has sold off around about a third of its total housing stock and has much of the money from this still available to pay for new building - if it was allowed to.

The Labour Government has also required that Council House rents should increase each year by MORE than the rate of inflation until they match the higher levels charged by the private sector such as Housing Associations. Even worse the Government has tried to force Councils into passing all their housing over to bodies like Housing Associations and Arms Length Companies. This can only be done if Council Tenants vote for it, but Government policy has been designed to try and leave them no choice. If for example tenants vote for transfer the government will wipe out the Councils housing debts (like the mortgage on a private house but for a council covering thousands of houses) and allow the new Housing Company to borrow money to modernise and repair the existing houses up to a satisfactory standard by 2010. But if tenants vote against transfer the Council have not been allowed to borrow the money needed to repair and modernise all their housing stock and they have not had their housing debts wiped out. Despite this completely unfair fixing of the system against those who wish to remain as Council Tenants, some as in Birmingham, have still voted against being transferred. Others as in Glasgow have voted in favour of transfer.

*Paul Holmes, MP says, "I grew up in a council flat in Sheffield and I can understand why many tenants prefer the security of being a Council Tenant. Equally though I know how badly run down much of the Council Housing in Sheffield is after half a century of Labour mismanagement. I also know that if a Conservative Government had imposed this biased and unfair system, Labour Councillors would be bitterly attacking Government policies. Surprisingly enough they have little if anything to say about the unjust policies being imposed by their own Labour Government. I would be interested to hear what people in Chesterfield think about the Government's attempt to force all Housing away from being Council run. Please write to me at The House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA."*

16 Jan 2003

## £20,000 bill and ballot cancelled!

**This years council elections will be held as an all postal ballot after the Government agreed to the Labour Councils request. Traditionally voters have the choice to go and cast their vote in secret in local polling stations. This will now be denied as all voters will receive ballot papers through the post.**

All postal voting has caused controversy across the country with accusations of voter fraud still being investigated by the police in parts of the UK.

*"Liberal Democrats on the Council opposed the plans on several counts,"* said Group Leader Ray Russell. *"Firstly the risk of fraud is extremely high as there is nothing to stop one person in the house filling out the ballot papers for the rest of the house and it increases the chance of voter intimidation. Secondly there is the increased costs, it is estimated that Chesterfield Council tax payers will have to pick up a bill for an extra £20,000 to pay for the scheme. And thirdly it is totally unnecessary, recent changes in the law mean that everybody who wants one can have a postal vote anyway, they simply have to ask the Council."*

Paul Holmes said, *"Last year Labour MP Harry Barnes and I both supported a cross-party group defending the secret ballot. Now Labour want to get rid of it! I can only assume that after losing the Westminster seat and two Council seats in 2001 and four Council by-elections in 2002, they must be looking ahead at the Borough Council Elections in May and thinking this is going to save their skin after years of complacency and neglect. Chesterfield people won't be taken in."*

16 Jan 2003

## 45,000 MANUFACTURING JOBS LOST IN 3 MONTHS

**Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, commenting on latest employment figures (15 Jan 2003), said: "Jobs in manufacturing are being lost hand over fist yet the Government is doing little."** Paul went on to say *"The UK is experiencing the longest manufacturing recession since the War and the worst Trade Deficit since official records were first kept in 1697. Today's figures underline the widening gap between manufacturing and the buoyant service sector.* The Government has failed to use the strong period of growth in recent years to deal with the lack of competitiveness caused by the overvaluation of the pound, and to provide a transport infrastructure to encourage companies to base themselves in areas of high unemployment.

*The Government now needs to wake up to the facts and deal with the increasing small-scale factory closures which have just as detrimental an effect on local communities as those that make the national headlines."*

Figures from the Labour Market Statistics Jan 2003 167,000 manufacturing jobs lost in the last year - 45,000 of them in the last quarter 45,000 finance & business services jobs lost in the last year - 22,000 of them in the last quarter 40,000 agriculture & fishing jobs lost in the last year - 14,000 of them in the last quarter

## Top Up Fees will create two tier system

Speaking at the Cambridge University Union debate "*This House Wants Grants Not Fees*" Paul Holmes MP condemned the leaked Government proposals to charge Top Up fees at 'elite' universities, He said, " Scrapping Grants and introducing Tuition Fees in 1997 has already caused massive hardship for students in general and deterred potential students from poorer backgrounds - including many in my constituency of Chesterfield. Differential or Top Up fees would mean a student from a less well off family facing £12,000 of fees to attend a University such as Cambridge on top of the average £12,000 debt a student already leaves University with.

We are facing a move in the direction of a two tier University system - the expensive elite for students from wealthy families and, to borrow a deplorable

Labour Government description of schools, the bog standard rest that they wouldn't touch with a barge pole. Liberal Democrats want an education system open to all on merit not according to the size of your wallet.

[More including speech...](#)

Our fully costed Manifesto in 2001 included abolishing all fees and reintroducing grants for poorer students. In Scotland and Wales Liberal Democrats in Government have already begun to implement this following the independent Cubie and Rees Reports. The extra money raised from Fees since 1997 was simply cancelled out by cuts in Government funding so Students paid a nd Universities were no better off anyway." 17th Jan 2003

Notes:

The motion supported by Paul Holmes MP, NUS President Mandy Telford and Andrew Cubie and opposed by Chris Woodhead and Dr Terence Kealey Vice Chancellor of Buckingham University, was overwhelmingly supported. Paul Holmes is Liberal Democrat member of the Education and Skills Select Committee, was a Head of Sixth Form in a Derbyshire Comprehensive School and was the first member of his family ever to go to university.

## Paul Holmes speech – Cambridge Union 16/1/03 This House Wants Grants not Fees

Most of you are far too young to remember Monty Python's Yorkshireman sketch - briefly it featured three well fed middle aged Yorkshire Businessmen, drinking wine after an expensive dinner and congratulating themselves on how well they had done in life despite their humble beginnings in life. "Eeh by gum lad who'd of thought years ago we'd all be sat here today" etc etc. Then they start a ludicrous competition to establish which one of them had the hardest start in life "Course I ad it tough – I ad to get up at 3 in morning afore I went to bed and lick road clean with me tongue, eat handful of hot gravel for breakfast ...." and so on, ending with the punch line "but you tell the youth of today that and they won't believe you!"

Well like Michael Palin one of the authors of the sketch, I'm a Yorkshireman from Sheffield too, but unlike Michael I didn't come from a middle class family in the 'posh' part of town. I grew up on what is said to be the largest Council estate in Britain if not in Europe – where the only black ties you see are on the pub bouncers and they wear DM's not DJ's.

But my version of the Yorkshiremen sketch in relation to Higher Education would be a little different. "Course WE ad it easy when I went University in 1975 .....WE didn't ave to pay Tuition Fees cos there weren't any.....AND I got a full grant to cover cost o' living so I din't ave to earn money during term time instead o' studying.....AND I could claim benefits in the 'olidays as well .....but you try telling that to the youth of today and they WON'T believe you!"

I made some of these points in my Maiden Speech to Parliament in June 2001 after I had won the very working class constituency of Chesterfield following 72 years of Labour rule there. I asked Parliament whether they thought that in 1975, with a father who was a low paid Council caretaker and a mother who was a part time Home Help I would have been able to become the first member of my family in history to go to university, if I had faced the thought of Tuition Fees and an average debt of £10 – 13,000 upon graduation as today's students do.

My answer to that is no – I wouldn't have. I also know having lived in Chesterfield for over 20 years that many of my constituents are now being put off the thought of applying as well. Having for 12 years been the Head of Sixth Form in Comprehensive schools I know personally how much more difficult it became after 1997 to persuade 'first generation' A Level students to consider University too.

That is why personally I very much support the abolition of all Tuition Fee payments by students and the restoration of free grants to students from lower income families. I'm pleased to say that that is also the policy of the Liberal Democrats. Our 2001 election manifesto committed us to scrapping fees, restoring grants for poorer students, restoring access to benefits for all during the summer vacation and initially raising the earnings threshold at which graduates start to repay loans from £10,000 to £13,000. We also committed more money to raise University Staff salaries and end the pay gap between male and female academics.

Before any cynics jump in and say this cannot be paid for, let me point out that the widely respected independent Institute for Fiscal Studies went through all three major party manifestos with a fine tooth comb in 2001. They judged that only the Liberal Democrats fully costed Manifesto added up over four years. The Conservatives didn't even pretend to and Labour's costings fell apart after two years. It's interesting to note that two years on, Gordon Brown is breaking his promise not to raise tax and is increasing National Insurance because a gaping hole was emerging in his costings! Plus of course Liberal Democrats in Government in Scotland HAVE scrapped fees and reintroduced grants for poorer students and in Wales they HAVE reintroduced grants for poorer students but were not allowed by the Labour Government in London to scrap fees even though they wanted to.

Of course there never was quite the 'Golden Age' of student finance that my version of the Yorkshireman sketch talked of. It is true that there were no Tuition Fees for students to pay and you could claim benefits during vacations. The free grants however were means tested and paid on a sliding scale according to parental income, with parents expected to make up the balance. Only about 14% of the population went into Higher

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Education then, compared to over 40% now and only 10% of those who went were awarded the full maintenance grant – as this poor Yorkshireman was.

Higher Education does have to be paid for by someone, just as ‘free’ state education from 4 – 19 is not really free but is paid for by universal taxation for the benefit of the whole country.

The question is how should we pay for educating students from age 19 onwards?

Is the best method to make students pay up front through tuition fees, while they are studying and before they are earning any money at all, let alone the so called Graduate premium that Labour talks about?

Is the best method to increase the average £10-13,000 debt already faced on graduation by charging 3-5% interest on student loans (currently only inflation is paid) - as the Government may be considering?

Is the best method to add top up or differential fees of £2-4,000 on top of the existing £1,100 fees paid by everyone? The Government may be considering this but perhaps only making you pay all this money after you have graduated instead of before – thus perhaps doubling the average student debt of £10,000, if you for example attended an elite university such as Cambridge. Of course the Vice Chancellor of Imperial College London wants to charge £10,500 tuition fees per year and at the University of Buckingham fees for English students are already around £7,000 per year.

If it is better to pay after graduation as the Government may be about to suggest, then is it better for the student to pay back their specific personal debt via loan repayments as at present.

Or through some sort of Graduate Tax?

Or should the cost come out of progressive general taxation – such as Income Tax? The beauty of Income Tax of course is that the high flying Lawyer like Cherie Blair earning a quarter of a million pounds per year pays a lot more Income Tax than the Graduate who becomes a Nurse, Social Worker or Teacher.

Lets look at some of the arguments we have heard:

Are Fees the answer?

I would say no because as well as being paid up front before the student is earning they deter the lower socio economic groups who are exactly those the Government supposedly wants to encourage into University – even those who might not have to pay once means tested, fear that they will have to. My experience as a teacher and on the doorsteps of Chesterfield tells me this is so.

But Margaret Hodge the Minister for Higher Education has also said the same to the Education Select Committee; research published by the Department for Education and Skills says so; Professor Clare Calendars research says so as did the Rees and Cubie inquiries in Scotland and Wales ; 35% of inner city A Level students in Liverpool said fees were ‘adversely affecting their decision on whether or not to apply to University’ ----- and there are lots more I could quote.

Top Up or Differential Fees are therefore even worse in terms of creating a bigger financial disincentive for all. But they would also deter poorer students from Universities like Cambridge. If applied to more expensive course then they would also deter students from some of the very shortage areas we most need to attract more people to, such as Engineering and Science.

Then of course there is the question of whether the income from fees really would benefit Universities. In Australia, where Labour is said to be drawing some of its ideas from, the level of Government funding of Universities has fallen from 90% to under half in just the last 20 years since Fees and loans were introduced.

In Britain funding per student from the Government fell by 7% in real terms after the introduction of Fees in 1997. By sheer coincidence this was balanced by the income from fees – meaning that Universities were no better off but students were much worse off. Given the Labour Governments track record of broken promises – or even dare I say it outright untruths, can we trust them not to cut their funding to universities once again as Fee income increases? Remember that Blair said in 1997 he had no plans to introduce fees but within weeks of the election introduced fees and scrapped grants. Then in 2001 the Labour Manifesto and David Blunkett both said Labour would not levy top up fees – now they may be about to do the exact opposite.

Does the Graduate Premium mean students should pay more?

The Premium of £400,000 is much quoted. But of course the average graduate earning £400,000 more over their lifetime than the average non graduate would also pay around £80 – 160,000 more Income Tax as well. So they are already paying more than the cost of their university education.

Those of course who go into public sector jobs will earn less than this and so be less likely to go into these already hard to recruit areas if laden with yet more debt.

Women have an average £250,000 gender gap in their Graduate premium and so once again will suffer even more under Government proposals for graduates to pay more.

Is there indeed no alternative way of filling the funding gap?

There is a funding gap due to the decline in real terms funding per student from 1979 to 2002. But there are alternatives to increasing student debt and disincentives.

The Department for Education and Skills underspend last year alone was £1.7 Billion – that is £470 Million MORE than the entire sum raised by Tuition Fees since 1997.

Much of the £9.4Billion spending gap identified by Universities UK is capital costs and over several years could be tackled in various ways –even the Chancellors now discredited PFI schemes if he continues to insist on hiding Public Sector spending in this way. This is now being done with the capital investment backlog in Schools and Hospitals.

In Scotland and Wales the presence of Liberal Democrats in Government led to the Independent Cubie and Rees Commissions – THEY did not recommend increasing Fees and Loans – quite the opposite has been done there.

In the end we are at a turning point between different visions of education and society. At one end we have the view summed up by Dr Kealey the Vice Chancellor of Buckingham University and Chris Woodhead a Professor at Buckingham University. Dr Kealey spoke to the Guardian on January 6<sup>th</sup> of a Britain with a mixture of state and private universities like his. He said “A minority will be liberal arts colleges like Buckingham....another minority like Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial..will be Ivy League places....and then the

## LABOUR AND TORIES VETO FREE PERSONAL CARE

Local MP Paul Holmes voted in the House of Commons on Wednesday (15<sup>th</sup> January) to stop the Conservative and Labour MPs joining forces to block Liberal Democrat plans to scrap the charges for personal care. The Government's Community Care (Delayed Discharge) Bill had contained a power that would allow any future Government to introduce free personal care quickly by regulations without a new Act of Parliament. The Government tabled an amendment on Wednesday night to restrict free care to no more than six weeks after discharge. The plan was opposed by Liberal Democrat MPs but won backing from Conservative MPs. A future Government committed to introducing free personal care would have to amend the law. Commenting on the debate Paul Holmes MP said: ***"Personal care should be free on the basis of a persons need not the size of their bank balance. We are not talking about luxuries here we are simply saying that help with feeding, dressing, washing and intimate care that should be free at the point of delivery. For Labour and Tory MPs to join forces to prevent a future Government introducing free personal care is appalling. The frail and chronically sick suffer a double whammy; they lose their health and then they lose their homes to pay for basic care. Liberal Democrats called for free care at the last General Election, we showed how it could be paid for. Labour, with the support of the Tories have relegated the elderly in England to the status of third class citizens. Thanks to the Liberal Democrats winning the case for free care the elderly in Scotland are treated with dignity and not discrimination."***

## Paul Challenges Prescott Over Ignorance of Disability Issues

Paul Holmes MP has written to the Deputy Prime Minister outlining the ways in which both the proposed Planning and Local Government Bills ignore disabled peoples needs. ***"I am shocked at the lack of consideration by the Government of the effect these bills will have on the day to day life of disabled people The Government's obsession with fast track solutions has meant that issues as simple as the accessibility of council tax information for disabled people has been over looked by these bills. The bill threatens to make the Disability Discrimination Act redundant in the area of planning"***

9th Jan 2003

## TOO LITTLE TOO LATE - DISABILITY BILL

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disabled People, commenting on today's announcement by the Department for Work and Pensions of its intention to publish a Draft Disability Bill, said: ***"The Government is yet again dragging its heels on giving disabled people the comprehensive equal rights available to other groups in society.***

***They have repeatedly broken their promise to introduce such full legal rights. Myself and NGO's such as the Disability Rights Commission have campaigned for such a move since the last election and it was widely expected that they would include this legislation in the Queen's Speech. Now we know why they didn't. In their worst traditions of spin they wanted to delay any progress for the sake of publicity connected with the European Year of the Disabled. The lack of a firm time scale in this announcement is worrying. The vague promise to legislate 'later this Parliament' means that the long awaited Disability Bill could be squeezed out once again as the next***

***election nears It is essential that disabled people get full, equal rights, well established before the Government proceeds in its aim of establishing a single Equality Commission."***

22 Jan 2003

## LIB DEMS OPPOSE BENEFIT CUT PROPOSALS

Paul Holmes Shadow Minister for Disability, has criticised the Government for its proposals on getting disabled people off Incapacity Benefit and into work. Among the proposals, being debated in the Commons today, is a focus on the introduction of compulsory work focused interviews for the majority of those on Incapacity Benefit. The changes mean that those who have just been medically assessed as being incapable of work will immediately be required to attend a work- focused interview.

Paul Holmes commented: ***"Liberal Democrats support the to removal barriers to work for those on Incapacity Benefit and the Government has made worthwhile proposals – the implementation of age discrimination, increased support and access to information. "The Government has been talking for years about the million disabled people who want to work, but has made no progress. Now they are threatening to withhold benefit from disabled people who are unfit for work, unless they come in to talk about job prospects. Given the many barriers to work already faced by disabled people, and the discrimination that many suffer, forcing them to discuss jobs on pain of loss of benefit is cruel and unnecessary. Disabled people who are able to work should be supported and not threatened.***

***The benefit system itself is a barrier to disabled people taking part-time work. It relies too much on an "all-or-nothing notion of disability."The benefit system needs to be changed to allow people to combine part benefit with part-time work. This would do more good for disabled people than new threats by the Government."***

23 Jan 03

## WILL CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY COPE WITH A MILLION MORE COMPLAINTS?

The backlog of complaints to the Child Support Agency are set to increase by more than a million yet the Government will not give answers on how it plans to cope with the surge.

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat spokesperson for Work and Pensions has written to the Secretary of State, Andrew Smith MP after he evaded answering a question on the expected complaints regarding the new IT system for the Child Support Agency. In an announcement on Monday, Andrew Smith told MPs that the new system for calculating cases will finally begin in March 2003.

Commenting on the response Paul Holmes MP said:

**"The Government claims that the new computer system will simplify what is paid in child support, making it easier for parents to understand the calculations. However in an internal bulletin the Appeals Service admits it is preparing for two million new complaints. The evidence suggests that the chaos has only just begun. The Minister can avoid answering the question but must prepare himself for the next round of shambles as parents find out the new calculations."**

[Full text of Paul Holmes MP letter to Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Andrew Smith.](#)

[Extracts from House of Commons Debate on the Child Support Agency 27th January 2003](#)

## **WILL CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY COPE WITH A MILLION MORE COMPLAINTS? Pauls letter to The Secretary of State...**

t Hon Andrew Smith MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
Richmond House  
79 Whitehall  
London SW1A 2NS

Wednesday 29th January 2003

Dear Andrew

It was originally expected that the new simplified child support scheme would come into effect from April 2002 for new cases and some time in 2003 for existing cases. In December 2001 the Appeals Service Newsletter Issue No6 said "the effect of all this on the Appeals Service is - that there is potential for renewed grievance on the part of a large number of people upto two million) who have accepted (however grudgingly) their current

entitlements and liabilities....one or other of the parties will almost certainly perceive themselves to be worse off...we must be prepared for a significant increase in the numbers of Child Support appeals we receive"

During your statement on Monday 26th January I asked you if the Appeals Service were now budgeting for upto a million new complaints as the new system was introduced. You appeared to overlook this question when you answered and I would appreciate your response now. What could be the total cost in terms of extra staff, for example of handling upto a million complaints and would the Appeals Service be able to cope with this volume of extra work on top of their current backlog?

I look forward to your prompt response in providing the answer you omitted on Monday

Yours sincerely,

Cllr. Paul Holmes MP  
Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Chesterfield

## **House of Commons Debate on the Child Support Agency 27th January 2003 Paul Holmes (Chesterfield):**

I thank the Secretary of State for giving advance sight of his statement.

The Liberal Democrats would have preferred to hear today that the Government were adopting our proposals to pass all the administration of child support over to the Inland Revenue, which already administers child benefit, will administer child tax credit and already has the names, addresses and tax records of everyone with children.

However, given that the Minister is now going ahead with the long-delayed attempt to streamline the existing system, if the Government and EDS are sharing the extra costs of the 18-month delay, does that mean that both were at fault in the delay?

Is it true that the appeals service is budgeting for up to a million new complaints as a result of the new system, as one internal newsletter suggests? When existing cases are eventually switched to the new system, is it still the Government's intention to switch them all at once, on the same day? If so, will the new computer system cope? Constituents who see friends on the new system will be asking us when they will be switched to it. What should we tell them?

Finally, can the Minister clarify why the new scheme starts on 3 March rather than 5 April, the start of the new financial year? The rhetoric so far has been of streamlining and simplicity, but the fear is that the chaos has only just begun.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks and his welcome, such as it was, for the introduction of the new system.

The hon. Gentleman asked about levels of compliance and general performance under the new system. I referred to levels of compliance under the existing system: cash compliance at 68 per cent. and case compliance at 71 per cent. With both of those, we expect to achieve 75 per cent. under the new system, so there will be a clear improvement.

Bringing on to the system all 300,000 recipients of income support who will attract the child support premium is an enormous gain. Taking that with the efficiency improvements in existing cases, we anticipate that some 80 per cent. of parents with care will be better off as a result of the new system.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the changeover of existing cases and whether that would be a big bang. We shall have to phase in the changeover of the existing 1.1 million cases. As to the date, I said in response to the hon. Member for Havant that we need to review the progress and working of the new system before setting it. Of course, I understand the attraction, when people see the benefits of the new system, of wanting to do that as soon as possible, but it makes sense with any big IT rollout to do it only when one knows that the system is working properly. That is what we shall do.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the date was 3 March rather than some time in April. This represents a big step forward, a big improvement for parents with care and a fairer system for non-resident parents as well. Other things being equal, the sooner it is introduced, the better. I am sure that if I were announcing it for April, the hon. Gentleman would be asking why it was not for March.

Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP  
Great Minster House 76 Marsham Street London SW1P 4DR

Dear Alistair Darling MP

I am writing to you as Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability concerning the Railways and Transport Safety Bill. I welcome the passage of this Bill and the current consultation about implementing the Disability Rights Task force recommendations on transport. Using this bill to make transport safer for disabled people would represent a good example of joined up thinking.

However there are areas of concern – firstly the suggestion in the explanatory notes on clause 2 of the examples given of the kind of accidents which will not be investigated by Railway Accident Investigation Branch because they are not of relevance to the operation of the railway. One of the examples given is tripping over on a railway station concourse. Will this also include one of the most common causes of accidents, getting on and off trains? Government research (Gallon et al, 1995) showed that this accounted for half of all accidents occurring in train travel.

Gaps between the platform and train can be quite large and if passengers are not sure where the platform edge is they may trip and injure themselves. Many choose to jump off the train to ensure they land on the platform, but this in itself can be hazardous. Furthermore, this has been identified as a significant problem with newer rolling stock, which leave a larger gap at the platform. Accidents also occur where the gap between the train carriages is large enough to cause confusion and potential disaster.

People are also worried about getting off the train on the wrong side and ending up on the track rather than the platform. All these situations could be improved by having announcements warning people about the size of the gap and of the correct side of the train to exit. Tactile paving at the edge of platforms is also vital to help people judge their position correctly. Tactile paving must be applied uniformly to all platforms to ensure passenger safety.

Appropriate train design should also improve this situation. Better use of colour contrast and tactile marking can help people locate door buttons. This will save people time in getting on and off and give them more chance of doing so in safety and confidence.

Clauses 47-52 talk about the setting of policing objectives by the police authority and the Secretary of State and the construction of a three-year strategy plan. One of the biggest worries for blind and partially sighted people travelling by train is the fear of attack. The presence of a white cane is often like waving the white flag of surrender to a mugger.

However, progress in dealing with crimes committed against disabled people is hampered by the fact that when a person is recorded on the police computer as a victim or perpetrator their disability is not recorded in the same way as their race. I welcome the fact that the Metropolitan Police are now introducing the recording of victim and perpetrators' disability on their computers. Clause 56 allows the Secretary of State to require the Chief Constable to supply information about matters related to crime committee on the railways. Will he be using this power to require the production of statistics on the number of disabled people who are victims of crime?

Will the Secretary of State be proposing an amendment to Clause 59 to require consultation with disabled passengers and their representatives so that their views can be taken on board in the planning process? Will the consultation documents be produced in large print tape and braille and be made available on an accessible web site to allow blind and partially sighted people to participate in the consultation?

The current system of considering transport safety in the pedestrian and road environment overlooks the serious impact on a person's confidence and ability to go out. Issues such as speeding traffic, pavement parking, illegal footway cycling and cycleways that are inadequately separated from pavements adversely affect disabled people. For example, pavement parking inconveniences all pedestrians but can make travel impossible for a wheelchair user. While paragraph 3.39 on the National Policing Plan which makes traffic policing a required part of each police forces' work is a step in the right direction some forces still need to give this area a greater priority. However, road accidents involving drivers, passengers and pedestrians, according to the transport statistics quoted in the consultation document, are higher than for other forms of transport.

One of the most dangerous parts of the pedestrian environments for blind and partially sighted people is level crossings. Knowing when they have arrived at a level crossing is increasingly difficult for blind and partially sight people because half barriers are now used. If a person is walking on the right hand side of the road there is nothing to physically stop them from walking onto the tracks. In addition, it is difficult to judge the safe time to cross. Audible signals are generally no longer used to signify that a train is approaching and there are no pedestrian crossing facilities.

Once crossing, people cannot tell if they are safe, and following the correct line of travel is not easy. A directional path – either tactile or visual – is necessary to guide people, and audible clues could also be used for this purpose.

Although there are many possible solutions to these problems, including full barriers, tactile paving and audible clues, more research needs to be done on how these can be linked to signalling. Implementing solutions will require a partnership approach between local authorities and Network Rail, because level crossings cover both highways and railway track.

Level crossings are likely to increase due to renewed interest in trams as a means of transport. The installation of tramlines must include safety features such as effective level crossings so that blind and partially sighted people are not put in danger. Though the safety of each level crossing is currently being assessed it is essential that these assessments are taking on board the needs of blind and partially sighted pedestrians. I would support the RNIB's suggestion that the Department of Transport produce statutory guidance about how to make level crossings safe and then require highway authorities and Railtrack to work in partnership to examine the safety of individual level crossings including for those with physical and sensory impairments.

Visually impaired people using buses are at the mercy of bus drivers to tell them when they have arrived at their stop and some drivers are more helpful than others. A visually impaired passenger who gets off at the wrong stop is left in a very vulnerable position that can lead them to be misled or prayed upon.

There have however been successful trials of visual and audible announcement in buses in Leeds. Their wider introduction would make bus travel a lot safer and we would like to know when the Minister tends to amend the Disability Discrimination Act PSV regulations to make visual and audible announcements compulsory.

Roadworks provide a major hazard for visually impaired people. I commend the introduction of the Road and Streetworks Act which requires barriers to be erected to minimise the hazard for visually impaired people and penalises those whose works last beyond the allotted time. However, the act only covers works carried out by the utilities and this bill should be as an opportunity to extend the act to cover all road works.

The introduction of the Code of Practice on the design of stations by the Strategic Rail Authority in 2002, the publication by the Department of Transport of Inclusive Mobility: A guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure were all appropriate measures. These codes of practice cover many issues, which affect how safe the transport environment is for visually impaired people, but are hard to enforce. Again this bill could be an opportunity to put these codes on a statutory footing and I would be very pleased to see it being made a criminal offence to break them like the codes of practice issued under the Roads and Streetworks Act. The opportunity should also be taken to give the Secretary of State the power to issue other codes of practice on transport safety issues.

In their consultation document in 1999 the then DETR consulted on the setting up of an integrated body regulating transport safety for all or some transport activities. This would have made sense in terms of the Government's integrated transport policy and facilitate the exchange of information on safety issues as they affect disabled people.

Even if a joint body is set up it would be useful for thereto be some form of co-operation between the heads of the new Rail Accident Investigation Branch and their equivalent for shipping and aviation. However, the lack of an equivalent body for road safety is a serious omission, which should be rectified. Whilst local authority officers and the police do their best there is not enough specialist knowledge. The current system of considering transport safety in the pedestrian and road environment overlooks the serious impact on a person's confidence and ability to go out.

I would appreciate your comments on the issues raised and look forward to your response.

I therefore look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely, Cllr. Paul Holmes MP Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Chesterfield

## 160 MORE JOBS LOST IN CHESTERFIELD

Speaking today on the proposed closure of the Eliza Tinsley Group Plant on Brimington Road, Chesterfield, local MP Paul Holmes said:

*"After holding discussions today with Group Chief Executive, Andrew Hall, it is clear that the proposed closure will go ahead once required consultations are complete. Work from the loss making plant is to be transferred to Italy, and to other plants in the UK. Some employees will be offered the chance to relocate but that of course presupposes they can move their family and that their partner does not have a job locally. The loss of another 160 manufacturing jobs in Chesterfield is yet another devastating blow to local people. The Chesterfield branch primarily made parts for agricultural tractors which were sold across Europe and has been hit by the decline in the agricultural sector. The closure of much of the mining industry has also hit part of their market.*

*The Group Chief Executive told me that part of the longer term problem was the attractive level of grants for capital equipment/investment offered by Governments elsewhere in Europe compared to Britain.*

*It does however also seem that the artificially high value of the Pound is a factor too. This drives up the cost of all imported raw materials and makes all British manufactured products less competitive when sold into other European countries. The UK is experiencing the longest manufacturing recession since the War and the worst Trade Deficit since official records were first kept in 1697. The East Midlands Region lost 18,000 manufacturing jobs in the last year. Meanwhile the Government is doing nothing to tackle this accelerating decline."*

29th Jan 2003

## MP BARRED FROM FACTORY

**Speaking on the proposed closure of Kitchen Engineering with a loss of 160 jobs in Chesterfield Paul Holmes MP said:**

"The Union convenor who works at the factory asked me to visit the site and meet the workforce.

I was of course happy to do this and contacted the management to ask if I could meet with them during the course of the same visit.

**I was appalled** when a phone call from the Group Chief Executive told me that I would not be allowed to visit the site at all.

The reason given was that the management wanted to **retain an atmosphere of normality.**

**This is after they have just told the workforce the factory is to close and they will all lose their jobs. HARDLY NORMALITY!**

As a result I met with the union convenor at my office in Chesterfield on Saturday morning and spoke to him again on Monday after he had met the management. The workforce are very dispirited as they feel the closure is a foregone conclusion.

**I am still waiting** to hear from the firms' management in Chesterfield in response to my request to meet them off site as I am prohibited from entering the factory.

***One question I would like to ask is if it is true that the site has already been sold to join the neighbouring development land on the Laver's site. I understand surveyors from B&Q were on the Kitchen Engineering Site three years ago! Closing factories on prime sites which can then be sold at a huge profit for housing or retailing use appears to many to be very like asset stripping."*** 11 February 2003

### [160 MORE JOBS LOST IN CHESTERFIELD](#)

[Original story from 29th January](#)

## Top Up Fees will create two tier system

Speaking at the Cambridge University Union debate *"This House Wants Grants Not Fees"* Paul Holmes MP condemned the leaked Government proposals to charge Top Up fees at 'elite' universities, He said, " Scrapping Grants and introducing Tuition Fees in 1997 has already caused massive hardship for students in general and deterred potential students from poorer backgrounds - including many in my constituency of Chesterfield. Differential or Top Up fees would mean a student from a less well off family facing £12,000 of fees to attend a University such as Cambridge on top of the average £12,000 debt a student already leaves University with. We are facing a move in the direction of a two tier University system - the expensive elite for students from wealthy families and, to borrow a deplorable Labour Government description of schools, the bog standard rest that they wouldn't touch with a barge pole. Liberal Democrats want an education system open to all on merit not according to the size of your wallet.

[More including speech...](#) Our fully costed Manifesto in 2001 included abolishing all fees and reintroducing grants for poorer students. In Scotland and Wales Liberal Democrats in Government have already begun to implement this following the independent Cubie and Rees Reports. The extra money raised from Fees since 1997 was simply cancelled out by cuts in Government funding so Students paid a nd Universities were no better off anyway." 17th Jan 2003

## Paul Challenges Government further over Its Ignorance Of Disability Issues

Paul Holmes MP has written to the Secretary of State for Transport, following the second reading of the Railways and Transport Safety Bill to outline the ways in which the Bill ignores disabled peoples needs.

The Bill, which implements the recommendation of Lord Cullen's Inquiry into the Ladbroke Grove train crash to establish a Railway Accident Investigation Branch, does not address such safety issues as knowing when you have arrived at a level crossings, whether you are at your chosen bus stop and getting on and off trains.

Paul commented: **"The Government has once again neglected to address the issue of disabled people's safety and there are many areas which will leave disabled people in dangerous situations. Disabled people have not been thoroughly consulted, their concerns properly addressed and instead they are left to deal with a transport system which they struggle to use. The Government must make a greater effort to reduce the barriers to traveling for people with disabilities, if they are to participate fully in society."**

7th February 2003

[Paul's letter in full....](#)

## “Everyone’s Council Tax Would Be Cut By £100”

Every Council Tax payer in the country would see their bills cut by £100 under proposals outlined by the Liberal Democrats, in Parliament.

To make the tax system fairer and simpler, the Liberal Democrats have published their Alternative Budget with proposals to give every Council Tax payer in the country a refund of £100, funded by national Government.

This would be a short term measure pending the complete abolition of the Council Tax and its replacement with a fairer Local Income Tax.

“The Council Tax is an unfair tax. It hits pensioners particularly hard,” said Cllr Ray Russell, Lib Dem Group Leader. “The Council Tax takes no account of people’s ability to pay, so a nurse or pensioner can pay more than a multi-millionaire.”

Average council tax rises across the country this year will be the highest ever. These large rises will mean average council tax bills have risen by over £400 under Labour. “Labour have made this Tory tax even worse,” said Lib Dem MP, Paul Holmes. “Only the Liberal Democrats are pledged to abolish the unfair council tax.” “Now with the Liberal Democrats’ national budget plans, we would be able to cut £100 off every council tax bill this year, in the run up to replacing council tax with a fair tax related to people’s ability to pay. Gordon Brown could do this now, if he adopted national Liberal Democrat plans.”

1) The Liberal Democrats have produced a fully costed alternative budget which includes the introduction of a 50% tax on any incomes over £100,000 a year to pay for the council tax cut and the abolition of student tuition fees.

2) The introduction of a system of local income tax is a long standing Liberal Democrat policy and was supported by the independent Layfield Enquiry of 1976.

3) A system involving Local Income Tax was supported by several Labour MP’s including David Blunkett and Jeff (now Lord) Rooker.

26th February 2003

## PAUL KEEPS PROMISE OVER CANCER MONEY

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, is keeping his promise to support Macmillan Cancer Relief’s campaign to ensure cancer services money reaches the frontline and gets spent where it’s meant.

Paul Holmes is one of over 70 MPs, from all parties, who is acting on a pledge to use his powerful, local influence to help ensure the new three-year NHS budgets deliver quality cancer services for local people

Paul Holmes has written to his Strategic Health Authority and asked what is being done to strengthen the system for tracking cancer money. This is crucial not just for making sure resources actually reach cancer services, but also for ensuring they get to those specific services that make the most difference to the quality of life of people living with cancer.

Paul said: *“Macmillan’s ‘Get It Spent Where It’s Meant’ campaign is important because it’s about helping to improve further the cancer services here in Chesterfield. Greater transparency in how we track resources is in everyone’s interest. It’s in the interest of people living with cancer in Chesterfield, so that they can be reassured that money is going to the services that improve their experience of cancer treatment and the care and support they are given. It’s in the interest of the NHS because it means more people will know about the excellent work local cancer services are doing day in and day out. And I want the information so that I can help spread that good news story and, where necessary, work with people living with cancer and the NHS to make our local cancer services even better. I would like to thank the Strategic Health Authority and Cancer Network for their continuing help in keeping me in the picture. It is vital that we all work together to get it spent where it’s meant.”*

## £4.6 Billion Funding Gap Despite £3,000 Tuition Fees At Most Universities

In response to questions from Paul Holmes MP, the Education and Skills Select Committee was told today that even though most universities would charge the £3,000 per year Top Up Fees a funding gap of £4.6 billion would remain after 2006. Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of Higher Education Funding Council for England, gave the figure which Margaret Hodge had refused to provide when previously questioned by Paul Holmes. University Vice-Chancellor Dr Peter Knight told the Committee that: *“There is not a Vice-Chancellor in the country who does not assume that their Grant from the Government will be cut once Top-Up Fees are introduced.”* Paul Holmes commented: *“Students will face up to £25,000 of debt but neither they nor the universities will be any better off in terms of facilities and teaching resources The whole thing is a shabby con trick by the Government. Meanwhile, as Dr Knight confirmed, the existing levels of debt are already putting graduates off from taking up postgraduate work.”* 14 March 2003

## SELECT COMMITTEE TOLD: NO FAITH IN FEES – ACCESS REGULATOR “A NIGHTMARE – A POLITICAL FIGLEAF”

In response to questions from Paul Holmes MP (Liberal Democrat) the Education and Skills Select Committee today heard evidence from Dr Roger Brown of the Standing Conference of Principles that:

He had no confidence that the income from Differential Fees would not be offset by equivalent cuts in Government funding – *“as had happened with basic tuition fees in Britain since 1998 and as had happened in every country like Australia where fees had been introduced.”*

Paul Holmes MP commented: *“The Committee heard the same evidence from the Universities last week. Students will be driven into over £21,000 of debt but the universities and colleges will be no better off – only Gordon Brown will benefit.”* In response to another question from Paul Holmes, Dr Brown told the Committee that the Government’s proposed Access Regulator was *“a nightmare, a mish mash, a political figleaf.”* Paul Holmes said: *“There is huge Government vagueness and confusion over how the Access Regulator will work. It was clearly a political sop designed to reassure the numerous Labour backbenchers who oppose Top Up Fees because they will create a two tier system of Higher Education based on ability to pay rather than ability.”* 14 March 2003

## Lib Dem Landslide finishes Labour off in Benn’s former seat

Triumphant Liberal Democrats are today (2nd May’03) celebrating after their landslide victory, gaining 17 seats to win Chesterfield Borough Council.

Labour have held Chesterfield for over 30 years and the town used to be represented in parliament until 2001 by Tony Benn, when the seat was gained by Lib Dem Paul Holmes. Lib Dems won 36 of the Council’s 48 seats, with Labour on just 12. The result could so easily have been 42 Lib Dem to just 6 Labour, but Labour held on by the narrowest of margins in a handful of seats. The result was also a disaster for the Conservative Party who only managed to field 5 candidates for the 48 seats. They polled a miserly 2.5% of the vote.

Labour scalps included Chesterfield Mayor, Paul Barry, in Holmebrook Ward, Deputy Leader of the Council Mick Brady in Hasland, former Deputy Leader

of the Council Rick Hennelly in St Leonards, former cabinet member Paul Vaughan (St Helens).

Lib Dem MP Paul Holmes said, *“This result is a resounding rejection of the Labour Party. Chesterfield people are fed up of 30 years of Labour rule and Tony Blair’s attack on public services like Council Housing.”*

## **EFFORTS TO HELP DISABLED PEOPLE INTO WORK HIGH ON PRINCIPLE BUT LOW ON DETAIL**

The Work and Pensions Select Committee Report into getting disabled people into work proves that the Government's efforts, whilst high on principle, are far too low on detail, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Disabled People, said today. Paul Holmes MP, said:

***“The Government’s efforts to help disabled people into work are high on principle but far too low on detail. The Government has fallen short in three main areas. They have not made it clear what is required of employers under the Disability Discrimination Act, how low the cost of workplace adaptations are for disabled employees and what Government cash is available to make the changes. The Government must try harder to explode the myths around employing disabled people. The New Deal for Disabled People is too target-driven with unrealistic goals for getting disabled people into work. The Government’s conveyor belt approach does not take into account the needs of each individual case. Today’s report proves this.”*** 14 April 03

## **PAUL BACKS DRIVE TO END THE PAY GAP**

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, has added his name in support of a parliamentary motion to highlight the campaign to end the pay gap between men and women.

The gap remains stubbornly high at 19% for full time work and a staggering 41% for part timers. The motion highlights recent research that the Equal Opportunities Commission has conducted into the numbers of employers who have carried out pay reviews. The research found that only 18% of large employers and 10% of medium sized employers have actually carried out a review. Worryingly, the majority do not plan to do a pay review at all.

Paul Holmes MP said: **“The pay gap means that women in Chesterfield are probably being undervalued in their pay packet every month by nearly 20%. Women working part-time may only earn 59% of the hourly rate of men I want employers to take a look at their pay systems. Often they may not even be aware that a pay gap exists. By reviewing the situation they can put it right and end this unfairness.”**

Julie Mellor, Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission added:

**“We know that the pay gap directly affects women all over the UK, across all sectors of the economy. The EOC particularly welcomes the support of Paul Holmes MP with the drive to close the pay gap in Chesterfield**

**“Across the UK, two thirds of women are in employment and 43% of women who work do work are part-time. The pay gap is an issue for them.**

**“Our research found that the majority of employers who have conducted pay reviews did not find it difficult. The EOC has produced a toolkit to help employers, and a version specially tailored for small business. We are confident that by making a commitment to equality employers will attract and retain the best people.”**

## **PAUL HOLMES MP MEETS LOBBY ON JOBCENTRE PLUS STAFFING CRISIS**

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, has met with a lobby which attended Parliament to discuss the staff cuts caused by the nationwide roll-out of Jobcentre Plus offices and its effect on local services. The lobby, organised by the Public and Commercial Services Union, asked MPs to meet with representatives to hear their concerns and put pressure on the Government

to ensure a local service is available to those with greatest need and that local jobs are not needlessly lost.

Paul Holmes MP said:

**“These cuts may be made in the name of efficiency but this often creates the greatest difficulties for those with the greatest need “These cuts come at a time when personal advisers’ workload is growing, the complexity of the benefit system has increased and some benefits take-up levels are low. This reduction in offices and staff will inevitably lead to a less personalised and detailed service as fewer advisers deal with more people.**

**“Jobseekers and benefits claimants will have further to travel each week to claim with the possibility they will be met with an overworked adviser without detailed knowledge of the claimant’s case.**

**“The Government must make greater efforts to ensure essential local offices are not closed down, that those reliant on Jobcentre Plus services are not left to travel miles every week to their nearest office and local jobs are not needlessly lost”.** 07 May 2003

## **GOVERNMENT MUST PAY TRAVEL COSTS FOR PUPILS TO ENSURE SPECIALIST SCHOOLS ACROSS SHEFFIELD BENEFIT NOT JUST THE WEALTHY - HOLMES**

Commenting on Charles Clarke’s announcement that every school in Sheffield would become a Specialist School **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat member of the Education Select Committee** pointed to the Committee’s report published on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, which was very critical of the Government’s Specialist School’s policy.

**“The Committee’s report makes it clear that the Government had no evidence on which to base the introduction and expansion of specialist schools. No research was done to examine the effect of specialist schools on neighbouring schools – clearly they draw in the best pupils and most supportive parents from nearby non specialist schools.**

**“Moves to make every school in Sheffield a Specialist School will not be unproblematic. Will the Government pay now for thousands of pupils to criss-cross Sheffield to attend the Specialist school that suits their ‘aptitude’? If not the whole programme is either a meaningless charade or only there to benefit wealthy parents who can pay their own transport costs**

**“From the start Liberal Democrats have opposed the implementation of a two-tier school system.**

**“We welcome the fact that the Government is now backing away from an elite tier of specialist schools by saying that all schools can achieve specialist status. But the damage has already been done to our schools, and to the education of children who have not benefited from the specialist schools’ bonuses of extra cash and extra status.”**

4th June 2003

## **PENSION BOOK UNDER DEATH SENTENCE, BUT NO CONVENIENT ALTERNATIVE**

The days of the pension book are numbered, despite 50% of UK pensioners preferring to receive their money this way.

The percentage reliant on this form of payment ranges to over 80% in some regions.

Letters are currently being sent to pensioners telling them to choose a different way to collect their money. By 2005, the much loved pension book will be a museum piece, and payments will have to be made through a bank account or Post Office Card Account. The new payment options imposed by the Department of Work and Pensions do not offer the flexibility of the pension book system:

Not all High Street banks or Building Societies have signed up to offer pensioners access to their money at their local post office. So, if pensioners have existing bank accounts with one of these banks, they will still not be able to cash those cheques in Post Offices.

This will hit pensioners in smaller towns and villages hardest, since many banks have closed branches in rural areas. So where will they get their cash from?

The Post Office Card Account has a complicated application system, and pensioners can only nominate one extra person to collect the pension on their behalf. This will be unworkable for those who suddenly fall ill, or who rely on a number of different carers.

Liberal Democrats want the Government to give pensioners the freedom to choose a payment system which is best for them. If a pensioner feels that a pension book suits their needs, they should be allowed to continue with that payment method.

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow DWP Minister said: "Our concern is not hollow sentimentality for the pension book, but recognition that the initial upheaval, and practical problems of the new system will not deliver any gain in flexibility or convenience for pensioners. The new payment options have been drawn up for the ease of the DWP, with no recognition of the needs of vulnerable pensioners. Not all banks and building societies have agreements with the Post office to allow pensioners to collect their money at local post offices. And with so many banks closing local branches, there will be real problems for some pensioners getting access to their money. Every pensioner who currently uses a pension book has already chosen not to have payment into a bank account and this choice should be respected. If pensioners want to continue to use their pension books, they should be allowed to do so." Tuesday 13th May 2003

Potential Problems of the 3 pension payment options:

Into a normal bank or building society account

Not all banks and building societies have agreements with the Post Office that will allow you to collect your money at your local post office. Currently only Girobank / Alliance and Leicester, Barclays, Lloyds TSB, the Co-Operative, Smile and Cahoot will allow you to do this.

Individual banks and building societies will have their own rules about allowing someone to pick your pension on your behalf

Into a new basic bank account

This type of bank account has limited facilities - state pension and other benefits can be paid in along with payments from other sources. Bills can be paid by direct debit but there are no overdraft facilities.

Not all banks and building societies have agreements with the Post Office that will allow you to collect money at your local post office. Only Abbey National, Alliance & Leicester, Bank of Scotland, Barclays, Clydesdale, The Co-Operative, Halifax, HSBC, Lloyds TSB, Nationwide, NatWest, Yorkshire, First Trust, the Bank of Ireland and Royal Bank of Scotland have agreed to let this happen.

Individual banks and building societies will have their own rules about allowing someone to pick your pension on your behalf

Through a new Post Office Card Account

This option is the most basic and only allows state pension and other benefits to be paid in and withdrawn. Pension money will be available from the Post Office on the production of a new credit card style plastic card and PIN number.

The information about the availability of this option and the complexity of the application process have come in for widespread criticism. Those who choose to apply for this option have to 1) Receive a letter from the Government telling them about the changes and informing them of the 3 options. 2) Call a Government helpline 3) Receive a welcome pack from the Government with a 'Personal Invitation Document'. 4) Take the Personal Invitation Document to the Post Office. The Post Office will then send the application back to the Government. 5) Another welcome pack with an account and PIN number will be sent out 6) Fill in original form and return it to post office.

A number of concerns over accessibility have been raised. Currently a pensioner can allow anyone to collect their pension on their behalf. Under the new system a pensioner can nominate one further person to collect their pension on their behalf. They will be sent an additional card and PIN number. There is currently no provision for a pensioner who falls ill to ask someone who has not previously been nominated to pick up their pension. Similarly pensioners who currently rely on a number of different carers to pick up their pension will not be allowed to carry on with this system.

There are also concerns about pensioners who forget their new PIN numbers. There is currently no way that a pensioner can access their money without a PIN.

## **FORMER COAL MINING COMMUNITIES DESERVE GREATER GOVERNMENT SUPPORT- HOLMES**

Speaking in a House of Commons debate on 'Economic Inactivity in the former mining communities' Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield called for the Government to act:

"The Treasury must end its clawback of five billion pounds from the Miners Pension Fund Surplus and return it to the mining communities it belongs to and a single streamlined grant awarding body to replace the complex alphabet soup of different bodies should be established.

"More accountability for large remote QUANGOS such as the Learning and Skills Council and the Regional Development Agencies is needed. These organisations, spending billions of pounds of public money, should work more closely with local communities.

"More investment must be made in the infrastructure of former coalfield communities including providing Broadband as a priority in order to attract the new businesses of the future. Finally a reversal of the closure of outlying Jobcentres in the more isolated communities which need them most as at Eckington in North Derbyshire should be a priority to provide the support and advice people need to get back into the workforce."

20th May 2003

## HOLMES PRAISES EUROPEAN YEAR FOR DISABLED PEOPLE BUT PUSHES GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE LONG TERM FUNDING

In a House of Commons debate on the European Year for People with Disabilities Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability pressed the Government to back its good intentions with adequate funding for local projects which support disabled people.

In his speech Paul pointed to the Ashgate Croft School in Chesterfield which is struggling to raise money for a new swimming pool to be built and the Fairplay voluntary scheme which recently had its second funding application for £36,000, which would have enabled the project to continue for a further year, turned down by the Department for Education and Skills.

“Ashgate Croft and the Fairplay scheme are only two examples of disabled people being deprived of the support and services they need because of lack of money. The Government must provide adequate financial resources to turn legislation and ‘good intentions’ into reality

“The Government must act more decisively to ensure that the European Year for People with Disabilities has a longer term impact on the full inclusion of people with disabilities into society rather than it just become a year long PR exercise.” 22nd May 2003

Notes:

2003 has been designated the European Year of Disabled People (EYDP) by the European Commission. The Year was officially launched under the Greek Presidency in Athens on 26 January 2003. The Department for Work and Pensions has the lead on disability issues within Government and is co-ordinating the UK programme of activities for the Year. The year was officially launched in the UK on the week beginning 20 January 2003. The European Commission set aside 12 million euros to recognise the European Year of Disabled People 2003. The UK’s share of this was just under £50,000 for launch events and £500,000 for project activities. The UK Government contributed another £2 million for project activities. The total funds allocated to EYDP projects was £2.3 million. This money was used to fund 171 projects, which were recommended by the National Coordinating Committee.

## 36,000 JOBS GONE TO WALL IN LAST 3 MONTHS

“*The Government is turning a blind eye to the hundreds of thousands job losses at the heart of British industry*”, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said today.

“*Today's new figures from the Office of National Statistics show that in the last three months 36,000 jobs were lost. 125,000 manufacturing jobs were lost over the last year. Paul, said: "Gordon Brown has turned a blind eye to the hundreds of thousands of job losses in British industry. The collapse in manufacturing employment is tearing the heart out of Britain's industrial capacity. "The Government has failed to use the strong period of growth in recent years to deal with the lack of competitiveness caused by the overvaluation of the pound. And they have failed to correct the imbalance between regional economies. Ministers must get to grips with the real economy of our towns and rural areas. Small scale factory closures have as detrimental an effect on the local community as the high-profile collapses that make news headlines."* 11th June 2003

Notes:

ONS - Labour Market Statistics June 2003 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk0603.pdf>

- \* In May 2003 the claimant count increased by 9,700 to 950,800. Average monthly rises of 4,200 over the last three months
- \* Unemployment on the Labour Force Survey measure increased by 36,000 over the quarter (Feb - April 2003).
- \* 125,000 manufacturing jobs were lost over the last year, 18,000 of them in the last quarter
- \* 36,000 agriculture and fishing jobs lost over the last year.
- \* 22,000 finance and business services jobs lost over the last year.

## “GTC AND GOVERNMENT FLAILING...”

Questioning the General Teaching Council last night the first Select Committee evidence session into teacher recruitment and retention, Paul Holmes MP said: “*You and the Government seem to be flailing in the dark - you don’t know if it is good or bad that up to sixty per cent of trainee teachers either do not complete their courses, do not enter teaching or leave within three years.*

*You have told us you don’t have comparison with wastage rates in other professions. You also don’t have comparisons to teacher wastage rates in previous decades.*” Speaking afterwards Paul asked: “*How can the GTC represent the professional interests of teachers if they don’t even assess the scale of the problem? How can the Government tackle recruitment and retention problems if it adopts an ostrich like head in the sand approach?*”

Paul went on to question the GTC about its role if it didn’t have the resources to commission such research or to be involved in teacher training issues. “Why have a Teacher Training Agency and a General Teaching Council?” he asked, “Shouldn’t the GTC be involved in training as other professional bodies are?” 20th May 2003

## GOVERNMENT POLICIES DAMAGE TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION IN ‘CHALLENGING’ SCHOOLS

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat member of the Education and Skills Select Committee, has called on the Government to recognise the negative effect their policies have had on recruitment and retention, as evidence given in today’s Committee meeting pointed out.

Paul said: “**Today’s evidence to the Committee maintained that Government policies on league tables and ‘naming and shaming’ has damaged staff recruitment to the very inner city schools that most need to attract the best teachers.** The teachers who used to work in inner-city schools were at the cutting edge or peak of their profession – current Government policies have now worked against this. The problems suffered by our most ‘challenging schools’ are largely beyond their immediate control, particularly over the issues of staff recruitment and retention. **The Government’s short-sighted, headline grabbing policies are undermining improvement in the very schools that need help most.**” 11 June 03 Notes

Professor Bob Moon of the Centre for Research in Teacher Education at the Open University told the Committee that teachers used to go to work in inner-city schools to be at the cutting edge or peak of their profession. Government policies however now worked against this. Professor John Howson of Oxford Brookes University responding to questions from Paul Holmes MP agreed that Government policies such as league tables worked directly against the recruitment of the best teachers into schools in challenging circumstances.

## GOVERNMENT OFFERS NOTHING OVER LOST PENSIONS AT CHESTERFIELD CYLINDERS, DEMA GLASS AND COALITE PRODUCTS LIMITED- HOLMES

Speaking after today's Commons announcement on Pensions Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield and Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions said:

*"There are some welcome proposals in today's announcement although we will have to scrutinise the details first. But the Government is offering little, if any, hope to employees who have already seen their occupational pension schemes collapse as at Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite Products Ltd. The proposed Pension Protection Fund is for the future. Andrew Smith was repeatedly asked in Parliament today about those schemes which have already 'failed'. He repeatedly said he wouldn't raise false hopes – making it clear that the Insurance Scheme was extremely unlikely to be retrospective!"*

Paul commented afterwards:

*"I have been raising these issues with the Pensions Minister since 2001 on behalf of my constituents through letters, questions in Parliament and in Parliamentary Debates. Only last Wednesday I called on the Government to stop its denial and delay over this issue. If they had taken action last year or the year before when I asked them to, these new proposals would already be in force and Dema Glass and Coalite Products workforce at least would benefit. I will be in Parliament on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> June to support Frank Field MP's Bill which would go further in protecting workers pensions rights than the Government's proposals today do."* 11<sup>th</sup> June 2003

## GOVERNMENT MUST PROTECT PROMISED OCCUPATIONAL PENSIONS - HOLMES

Speaking in support of the 'Pensions Theft' protest march on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> June Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield called on the Government to support the Pensions Winding Up Bill to protect employees' pensions in the winding-up of a company. The march by deferred members of many wound-up schemes throughout the UK will take place on Whitehall at noon on Sunday to protest against the loss of their promised occupational pensions. A petition will also be handed in to Number 10.

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield said

**"The Government have dithered and delayed for too long over this legalised robbery of pension funds. Constituents of mine who worked for three firms (UEF in 2001, Dema Glass in 2002 and Coalite Products in 2003) have been told that despite in some cases paying into their pension fund for 40 years they will get only 40% or even less of their money. The Government admits that the inadequate State Pension will not be enough and tells everyone to save for their retirement. Yet they sit back and allow pension funds to leave pensioners in the lurch in this way. I have been raising this issue with Ministers ever since 2001 and most recently in the House of Commons during last Wednesday's Liberal Democrat debate on the Pensions Crisis. The Government must act now - and supporting Frank Field's Private Members Bill on 20th June would be a good way to make up for years of inaction."** 6<sup>th</sup> June 2003

HC Deb 4<sup>th</sup> June 2003 Col 268

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): In the few remaining minutes, I shall move on to two linked items from the motion. The new Minister for Pensions, when appointed, will be the sixth in six years. That rapid turnover, and the long delay in appointing a new Minister, suggests the lack of priority accorded by the Government to pensions issues. Similarly, I note a lack of urgency in dealing with the problems of private company pension schemes, which are a matter of great concern to many people. Numerous examples have arisen and been widely discussed in the House and across the country.

The Government urge everyone to pay into private pension schemes, warning that we can no longer rely on the state pension. Yet horror stories about underfunded schemes and schemes that fail to pay out when companies go into receivership are numerous, growing and can only deter people of working age from entering into such schemes. Examples abound: some have been raised today, and others in the past by myself and other hon. Members. In 2001 Chesterfield Cylinders, one of six companies in the country owned by United Engineering Forgings Ltd. went into receivership. The employees, some of whom have worked for the company and paid into its pension scheme for 40 years, are still waiting to hear precisely what will happen, but have been advised that they may receive as little as 30 or 40 per cent. of the pension that they had saved for over their whole working lives. The following year, Dema Glass, also in my constituency, went into receivership and the workers were told exactly the same story: they would eventually receive a tiny fraction of the pensions that they had paid into all their working lives. Many of my constituents have been hit during the past few months by the problems of another company, Coalite Products Ltd., which is based just outside my constituency in Bolsover. Eighty-two of my constituents have been made redundant, and all now face vastly reduced pension payments for the same reason. We heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) about similar problems with Allied Steel and Wire. The common factor is not fraud, as happened with the Maxwell pensioners. People are losing 50 to 60 per cent.—possibly more—of the pensions that they have paid for all their working lives, but it is legal. It is the product of several factors. The fall in stock market values is one, and pension holidays, which companies take in good times without making up for them in bad times, are another. Using funds for early retirement rather than redundancy robs the pension fund for people who are still in work. To add insult to injury, 15 per cent. or more of what is left in the fund often goes to the receivers in the long drawn-out process of winding schemes up.

I raised those issues in a letter of 2001 to the former Minister for Pensions, the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), in oral questions and in debate in the Chamber last year. Two years on, however, there has been no concrete response—nothing, other than saying that measures exist to counter fraud. As I said, this is not fraud: it is legalised robbery. The only concrete proposals from the Government side in those two years have come from the private Member's Bill introduced by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I shall be here to support it on Friday 20 June. I close by repeating the cry that we have heard from several hon. Members over the past two hours. The Government must act on pensions very quickly to tackle the pensions crisis and bring two years of dither and denial to an end.

## END RIP OFF OF MINERS' PENSIONS - HOLMES

Speaking in a parliamentary debate Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield called upon Brian Wilson MP, Minister for Energy and Construction to:

1. End the Government's £5 Billion rip off of the Miners' Pension Fund
2. Invest more in rebuilding the infrastructure of the devastated coalfield community areas such as Chesterfield and North Derbyshire.

Paul added: **"One of the biggest single problems brought to me at my weekly surgeries is that of miners pensions and compensation for miners' industrial diseases.**

**"I had the privilege of being taken down Markham Pit by Chesterfield Miners just a year before the Tory Government closed it down. Anyone who has witnessed at first hand the conditions miners worker under will agree that the Treasury – especially under a Labour Government – should not be taking billions of pounds OUT of miners pensions."**

10<sup>th</sup> June 2003

## GOVERNMENT IGNORANT OF CURRENT AND FUTURE NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES - HOLMES

**Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability** today co-sponsored a Parliamentary Motion supporting the inquiry by the John Grooms charity into the needs of young disabled people. The motion pointed to the inquiry's worrying findings that there is insufficient accurate information about the situation facing disabled people and called on the Government to do more to ensure that the needs and rights of all disabled people are met and that future care services are coordinated effectively, funded adequately and are appropriate to the needs of the user.

Paul Holmes commented:

**“My 12 years as a Councillor in Derbyshire and now my experience as MP for Chesterfield confirms the research by John Grooms. Disabled people often find that provision for independent living is often badly cash limited by the general under funding of Social Services Departments. This under funding is made worse by the absence of any coherent information about what is available -especially to those younger people who encounter the system for the first time when disability results from an accident or severe illness. I know this from the first hand experience of the teenage son of a friend, who is now confined to a wheelchair following an accident a few years ago. If the fine words about Disability Rights are to mean anything in reality then adequate financial resources and coherent information and support services must be a priority.”** Tuesday 3 June 2003

Early day motion

Primary sponsor Anne Begg MP Needs of Disabled People

This House welcomes the John Grooms Inquiry into the needs of young disabled people; notes that the report shows there is a constantly growing number of disabled people and its worrying findings that policy-makers and service providers do not have sufficient accurate information about the situation facing disabled people, which often results in uncoordinated and inappropriate care, housing and health services; calls on the Government to give a greater priority to ensuring that the needs and rights of all disabled people are met and to play a strategic role in making available the necessary information so that future care services are coordinated effectively, funded adequately and are appropriate to the needs of the user.

## NEW FUNDING IS ONLY A SMALL STEP FORWARD - HOLMES

Government funding to help employers update their businesses for disabled staff is a welcome but small step, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability, said today.

The amount available for Factory Support Grants will be increased in 2003/04.

Paul Holmes MP said:

***“The announcement of increased funds is a welcome but small step. The increase in funding only relates to 2003/4. Questions need to be asked over whether it is a one-off measure or whether the Government is committed to sustained funding. For all the Government's triumphant words, employers do not know about the WORKSTEP scheme and the grants available to adapt premises to meet the needs of disabled employees. The Government must do more to publicise the scheme.”*** 11<sup>th</sup> June 2003

## SELECT COMMITTEE TOLD “DEBT IS A DETERRENT” FOR STUDENTS - LIB DEMS TO PROVIDE GRANTS FOR POOREST STUDENTS AS WELL AS ABOLISHING TUITION FEES FOR ALL - HOLMES

Commenting after today's Select Committee hearing Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat member of the Education and Skills Select Committee said:

“We were given clear and overwhelming evidence that fees and student debt is a deterrent to students entering Higher Education. Especially those from lower socio-economic groups who are precisely those the Government needs to attract into university – numbers from socio-economic groups D&E entering university have fallen from 17% in 1997 (when fees were introduced) to 8% today.

Phil Willis, Liberal Democrat Education Spokesman, told the Committee “this was one of the key reasons Lib Dem policy is to abolish all Tuition Fees (funded by Higher Rate Income Tax) and now to also provide free grants to the poorest 30% of students (funded from the same source)

Phil told the Committee of the extensive research evidence that reveals the deterrent effect of Fees and debt on students citing the South Bank University work, the extensive Joseph Rowntree Foundation research and opinion poll research among others.

Paul Holmes said: “The Committee were hoping to hear evidence from the Conservative Party too. We postponed writing up our final report and last week invited both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties to submit evidence. So far the Conservatives have not responded.

**“Perhaps their ‘road to Damascus’ conversion/back of envelope figures on Tuition Fees will not stand up to public scrutiny. Not surprisingly a leading university academic, Professor Nick Barr, has written a highly critical analysis of their plans which is published today.”** Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2003

## TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION COULD GET WORSE

Evidence presented to the Education and Skills Select Committee today by the National Employers Organisation for School Teachers showed that teacher turnover was back at the record levels of 14% (2001-latest figures) last experienced in 1990/1991. Graham Lane told the Committee that the shortening of the pay spine from 9-5 points had been under-funded by the Government partly causing the funding crisis and the increased teacher redundancies this year.

Paul Holmes questioned the Headteachers' representatives about the second strand of the Employers package – the workload and conditions agreement due to start this September. NAHT representative, Kerry George, told Paul that, ***‘Heads were not sure the money would be there to implement the agreement this September let alone in future years’***. Paul said: ***“There is clearly a grave danger that if you raise teachers' expectations of improved pay and conditions and then do not fund this, the disillusionment and bad press that will result, will make teacher recruitment and retention problems even worse than they already are. The Headteachers' representatives warned that already stressed Heads and Senior Managers might have to take on all the administrative chores that classroom teachers will no longer have to do from September – unless the Government provided the necessary funds to pay for administrative and support staff.”*** 18<sup>th</sup> June 2003

## TORY DELAYING ANTICS BLOCK BOTH PENSIONS & HEDGES BILLS

*“Today’s performance in the House of Commons was an outrage”* says Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield after stupid antics by Tories in the Commons.

*“The High Hedges Bill had passed through Standing Committee with no opposition at all. But for this morning’s debate Conservative MP’s tabled over 80 amendments. There was time to debate less than half and the Bill will now be moved to a Friday in July but it maybe lost altogether. All those who suffer from high hedges, mainly Leylandi which can grow to 40 foot, will be outraged by this. Worse still these delaying tactics by just two or three Conservative MP’s meant that there was no time at all to discuss Frank Field MP’s Bill on Pensions. The Government then officially objected to the Pensions Bill being sent on to discussion in committee In order to block its progress. Constituents of mine who have seen their pensions slashed at Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite Products Ltd will want to know why Conservative MPs and Government Whips indulged in this outrageous double act.”*

20<sup>th</sup> June 2003

### A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Commenting on the Committee for the Amendment to the to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability** said: **“Today’s amendments to the Act are welcome improvements and received all party support. But it is another missed opportunity by this Government.** Instead of adding layer upon layer of complex regulations they should pass a Single Equality Bill dealing with all areas of discrimination and simplifying and standardising the law. Lord Lester has already piloted such a Bill through the Lords and 242 MPs supported a Motion backing it in the Commons. Meanwhile we are still awaiting the draft Disability Bill promised six months ago. There is a clear danger this Bill, when it is eventually produced, will run out of Parliamentary time as the next election approaches.” 24<sup>th</sup> June 2003

### MIND YOUR HEAD

Paul Holmes has expressed support for people with dementia and their carers in Chesterfield, in the run up to Alzheimer’s Awareness Week.

The theme of the week, which will run from 6-12 July 2003, is ‘Mind Your Head’. The Alzheimer’s Society will be focusing on the risk factors which may increase someone’s likelihood of developing dementia and the practical steps that we can all take to try and lower our risk. Paul said: *“I am very happy to be supporting the Alzheimer’s Society in their Awareness Week. Dementia affects one in five people over the age of 80 and understanding some of the risk factors will enable us all to be more proactive about taking steps to protect our health. More than 945 people living in Chesterfield have dementia and more than three times that number area affected by the consequences. My own father suffered from Alzheimer’s before he died and I know at first hand what problems dementia causes for all involved.”*

Harry Cayton, Chief Executive of the Alzheimer’s Society said: *“I’m delighted that Mr Paul Holmes MP is supporting Alzheimer’s Awareness Week. The Week will tell people about steps which we can take which may lower our risk of developing dementia. The Alzheimer’s Society are engaged in exciting research looking for treatments and cures.”* 26<sup>th</sup> June 2003

Notes: **The Alzheimer’s Society is the UK’s leading care and research charity for people with dementia and their carers. Over 700,000 people in the UK have dementia. More than half have Alzheimer’s disease. Alzheimer’s disease is a disease of the brain that cause memory loss, personality changes and physical disability. Dementia affects one in 20 people over the age of 65 and one in five over the age of 80.**

### MINORITY REPORT: TUITION FEES PUSH POOREST STUDENTS AWAY FROM UNIVERSITY

**A Minority Report on *The Future of Higher Education* highlights evidence that tuition fees deter poor students from entering higher education.**

**Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Member of the Commons Education & Skills Select Committee**, has broken from Labour and Conservative colleagues to issue a new version of Chapter 7, “University Funding & Student Support”.

Publishing his new chapter, **Paul Holmes MP** said: *“The prospect of increased tuition fees and higher student debt will put off poor students who are considering going into higher education. The rest of the Committee has ignored the overwhelming evidence that the increase in income from differential fees would not provide extra resources. As with current tuition fees, extra resources would simply be offset by reductions on Government funding. Progressive taxation should fund higher education. We should not plunge students into £21,000 of debt: Britain is already a debt-ridden society. Do we really want our nurses, teachers and social workers saddled with debt from the start when we know they don’t always earn enough even to buy their own houses? Liberal Democrats would abolish tuition and top up taxes on students, reintroduce grants of £2,000 per year and invest in higher education to rectify decades of underfunding. This would be paid for by increasing the higher rate of income tax on the 1% of the population who earn over £100,000. The Committee is clear in its criticism of the Government’s disastrous proposals on research funding and the arbitrary target of 50% participation in higher education. But the Government’s proposals let down poorer students and risk making university a choice for the better off. Britain should be investing in all our young people, not a select few.”*

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> July 2003**

Notes:

Points on which the Committee agreed include:

- Criticising the Government White Paper’s disastrous proposals on Research Funding
- Highlighting the lack of resources to meet the Bett Report recommendations on restoring academic pay
- Questioning the arbitrary target of 50% participation and the badly thought out proposals to rapidly replace tried and tested HNDs with new Foundation Degrees.
- Exposing the ‘political fig leaf’ of the “Off Toff” Access Regulator.

Last year when the Committee reported, Paul Holmes MP issued four alternative proposals on this issue because the 10 Labour and Conservative MPs on the Committee were ignoring the evidence of the Rees Commission in Wales and the Cubie Report in Scotland. This year a great deal of extra evidence was submitted, including that of the Clare Callendar report on attitudes to debt, published in February 2003, the Joseph Rowntree Report of May 2003 plus submissions from many Vice Chancellors.

Conservative attendance at the Committee’s evidence sessions on Higher Education has been 39%. The Recorded Vote on my Minority Report on Student Finance (Chapter 7) shows that just one out of three Conservative Committee Members was present and voted with the Labour Members. The Conservative Higher Education Spokesman also failed to accept the invitations to give evidence to the Committee.

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2003

## **JOBS CONTINUE TO HAEMORRHAGE IN MANUFACTURING**

133,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the last year, 34,000 of them lost in the last quarter, according to new ONS figures published today. Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said:

“The Government’s claims of record employment levels cannot mask the haemorrhage in the manufacturing sector. By turning its back on the manufacturing sector, the Government has turned its back on the families dependent on those jobs to survive. Ministers must get to grips with the real economy of our towns and rural areas. Small scale factory closures have as detrimental an effect on the local community as the high-profile collapses that make news headlines.”

### **Trebor to close with loss of 245 jobs in Chesterfield**

Responding to the shock announcement this afternoon that Trebor is to close, local MP Paul Holmes said: *“This is another bitter blow for the people of Chesterfield who have seen traditional local industries, from coal mining to engineering and manufacturing, all but wiped out over the last twelve years.*

*I have talked with Keith Dennis the Director of Personnel at Cadbury Schweppes and they are clearly not going to change their mind over this decision. They propose to close the factory by March 2005 with equipment being transferred during 2004 and redundancies taking place throughout that period. Some jobs might be transferred to Sheffield and Cadbury Schweppes will provide redundancy payments in excess of statutory requirements as well as a good support programme to help employees seek new jobs. But none of this can make up for the loss of 245 full time jobs here in Chesterfield.”* When I visited Trebor in 2002 they explained the difficulties they faced because they worked in out of date buildings. They knew then that they faced the danger of losing out to other factories in the Cadbury Schweppes empire. But the management and employers alike were proud of the steps they had taken to modernise production methods and introduce new lines to cater for the changing modern market. They felt then that they had a good chance of saving local jobs in their historic Chesterfield base. Instead they have been told this afternoon that their jobs are to be lost. Another Cadbury Schweppes factory in Manchester has been told this afternoon that they are to lose their jobs as their output is transferred to the USA.”

Paul said, *“On top of the wholesale pit closures we have seen firms like Markham Engineering, Dema Glass, Eliza Tinsley and now Trebor close while former major employers like Robinsons and Donkins have been reduced to a shadow of their former strength. In some cases jobs are lost to other areas. Markham's portfolio was transferred to Sheffield and part of Trebor's output may go there too. Chesterfield can sometimes lose out because Government money and Grants for redevelopment and modernisation are more readily available in so called priority areas like Sheffield than in Chesterfield. Meanwhile a Government preoccupied with London and the overheating economy of the South East has sat back and watched manufacturing industry in the rest of Britain decline over the last six years to its lowest ever level in modern times.”*

## **On the Road With RSPCA**

Chesterfield MP, Paul Holmes spent a day with local RSPCA inspector Mick Darling to find out first hand about his animal welfare work in North Derbyshire. After visiting the Chesterfield

Animal Centre Paul accompanied

Inspector Darling as he followed up complaints of animal cruelty and neglect in the area.

Mick Darling said: *“Sadly, animal cruelty is a daily occurrence and the RSPCA is called in to investigate these allegations as well as offer advice to pet owners and rescue animals in distress. I am delighted that Mr Holmes took time out from his busy schedule to join me for the day to get a better understanding of the work we do.”*

Paul Holmes has supported the RSPCA on a number of issues in Parliament including the protection of badgers, seal hunting, live exports and the conditions of laying hens. He sat on the Standing committee for the Hunting Bill and moved the successful amendment in Parliament to ban the hunting of Mink with packs of hounds.

Paul said: *“I already had experience of the work of the RSPCA Animal Centre in Chesterfield and the RSPCA’s excellent lobbying work in Parliament. Spending a day with an Inspector was a fascinating insight into another area of RSPCA activity and the sort of day to day work they undertake.*

*I also learned a lot about the legal limitations that face them and the need to modernise animal welfare. I have arranged another day out with Inspector Darling later this summer.”* New animal welfare legislation is currently being looked at by the Government and the RSPCA is consulting with DEFRA on the detail to be included in a new bill. 15 July 2003

## **Computers for schools - funding gap help**

On Friday 26<sup>th</sup> Sept Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes visited Tesco's to hand out certificates and computer equipment to local schools which had taken part in this years Tesco Vouchers/ Computers for Schools initiative. Paul said *“As a parent and as, previously, a teacher, I have often over the years taken part in this initiative from the school and pupils point of view. It was a pleasure to sit on the other side of the fence and hand over some of the equipment this year. Where the computer equipment is an extra or the 'icing on the cake' this is an excellent scheme. It is a shame that sometimes in the past, under funding of our schools has left them reliant upon initiatives like this to obtain basic educational equipment.”*

# TORY TURNAROUND ON WINTER FUEL PAYMENTS MUST BE MATCHED WITH MONEY

Responding to the Conservatives announcement of a reversal of their winter fuel payment policy **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability**, warned that this was a surprising turnaround and that finding the money for such a commitment would be no easy task in the face of the Conservative's policy of cutting public spending by 20%.

Despite not one Conservative MP signing the EDM tabled by Paul Holmes at the start of this parliamentary year calling for an extension of the winter fuel payments to severely disabled people, which has been re-tabled by Paul this session, the Conservative spokesman claimed in Disability Now magazine that it was a 'glaring inequality'.

**Paul Holmes** commented: "This would be a welcome and amazing conversion to what is already Liberal Democrat policy. However while the Conservatives may seek to introduce a 'caring' policy there must be great concern about how they will fund such a commitment. The Conservatives continue to spend with one hand and cut with the other – such as promising to abolish tuition fees while planning to slash spending by 20% and cut tax. It is all too easy to make promises without having the money to pay for them. While the Conservatives may use fine words on this issue it is the Liberal Democrats who have already committed to this policy and provided the budget to fund it." 28<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

Notes to Editors:

**EDM 209 WINTER FUEL ALLOWANCE** 27.11.02 Holmes/Paul That this House notes with concern that, although pensioners over the age of 60 years can claim a winter fuel payment of £200 a year, there are one million severely disabled people of working age who are not eligible for the payment, many of whom feel the cold intensely and cannot afford to heat their homes adequately; notes also that the vast majority of those who would benefit are not in work, where their heating would be provided during working hours, and that heating is essential for the therapy required by any disabling ailments, just as many produce an added need for hot water; and calls on the Government to extend the winter fuel payment to disabled people who receive the middle or the higher rate of the disability living allowance care component or the higher rate of the mobility component.

## GOVERNMENT IGNORANT OF current and future needs of Children with disabilities

Commenting on a report into disabled children's services **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability**, urged the Government to act now to ensure that the needs and rights of all disabled children are met and that future care services are coordinated effectively, funded adequately and are appropriate to the needs of the user. The report published today by the Audit Commission reveals that services for disabled children are a lottery, dependent largely on where they live and how hard their parents are able to push for change. The study found a jigsaw puzzle of services, characterized by families having to struggle through a maze of providers to track down essential information and support. It also found that services are rarely based on the priorities and needs of individual families, and what is provided is too little too late to make the best possible improvements to their everyday lives.

Paul Holmes commented:

"My 12 years as a Councillor in Derbyshire and now my experience as MP for Chesterfield confirms the report's findings that under funding of these services is made worse by the absence of any coherent information about what is available

"The Government must act upon the Report's recommendations – introducing a National Service Framework as a step in making these services more accessible and coherent to families.

"If the fine words about Disability Rights are to mean anything in reality then adequate financial resources and coherent information and support services must be a priority."

17<sup>th</sup> September 2003

Notes

The Audit Commission's national study *Services for Disabled Children and their Families* was published today. The study identifies four critical components that together make up truly effective services for disabled children: Services meet families' needs. Service providers understand what families want and need, and use this to commission and deliver the right services.

Families participate in everyday life. Both specialist and mainstream services focus attention on helping families participate in everyday life.

Services recognise that children grow and move on. Services are designed and delivered around clear understanding of the impact on a child's development of supportive, timely and appropriate services.

*Services recognise, recruit and develop the right people. Front-line staff are trained and supported to understand the individual needs of service users, and work with users in respectful partnership.*

The Audit Commission recommends that all relevant public sector bodies should identify what matters most locally and agree a joint plan of action to improve services with their strategic partners, including those from the independent sector.

Other key recommendations include for the Government to ensure that the National Service Framework for Children is implemented as a matter of priority. Also, the Minister for Children should review the intended impact of policy initiatives for this group to challenge ambitions and ensure consistency between departments.

Alongside the national report, the Commission has produced a range of practical tools aimed at different groups, to help drive improvement. These include an improvement pack for service providers, a series of factsheets for families and carers, and a child-friendly summary giving disabled children advice on getting their views across.

A group of disabled young people from Triangle services, a Brighton-based consultancy, advised the Commission team throughout the study, and helped to develop the different products. The Commission also worked with parents' group aMAZE, which wrote the factsheets for families. The report, improvement pack, factsheets and summary are all available at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

## GOVERNMENT MUST GET MEDICAL ASSESSMENTS RIGHT FIRST TIME

Responding to the National Audit Office report into decision making in social security benefits **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability**, called on the Government to make sure decisions on disability benefits are right first time round instead of forcing claimants to rely on appeals.

The report states that since reforms to the decision making process in 1999 decision making accuracy for Disability Living Allowance has fallen - 8% of decisions leading to an appeal and the number of successful appeals rising with over half currently decided in favour of the customer.

Paul Holmes MP said: *"People are missing out on their money whilst they wait for their appeal to be considered. Other people, who accept the wrong decision, will never get the money they deserve. The key is to get the assessment right, first time. More progress must be made. The Government must reform the inflexible target culture which pressurises overworked Jobcentre staff into pushing unwell people towards work."*

7<sup>th</sup> November 2003

## 'IS OFSTED SATISFACTORY?'

Ofsted faced a tough inspection of its own today from members of the Education and Skills Select Committee. **Liberal Democrat Member Paul Holmes MP questioned Ofsted on three areas:**

### Disability and Social Inclusion

Paul asked about Ofsted's role in upholding anti-discrimination legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act. Paul pointed out that "Ofsted statistics show that academically successful schools at the top of league tables usually have **well below the national average levels of children with Special Educational Needs** or Free School Meals" and added "clearly covert or overt selection is often going on contrary to Government policies on social inclusion".

### Inaccurate Inspectors

**Paul asked:**

"Given the size and power of the Ofsted empire (2,500 staff, £200 million cost per year) **is it important that your reports are accurate?**"

"When you inspected St John Rigby school in Bromley you reported that 'the Headteacher provided strong, sensitive and skilled leadership and that financial planning and administration were good.' But the Headteacher was later described in Court as a 'bully who brooked no dissent' and she was sent to prison for embezzling half a million pounds of school funds. **"YOUR REPORT WAS NOT WORTH THE PAPER IT WAS WRITTEN ON."**

Paul said "Myerscough College in Lancashire and Summerhill School have also submitted evidence to the Committee showing that their more recent Ofsted Inspections have been **"unfairly and unjustifiably critical"**.

### Satisfactory – the new Unsatisfactory

Finally Paul asked about the new rules for Ofsted Inspectors which direct that 'teaching that is generally satisfactory with little that is better merits a judgement of unsatisfactory.' Paul referred to new evidence provided by Ofsted to the Committee only yesterday (4<sup>th</sup> November) which revealed **a 35% increase in schools being put into Special measures and a 30% increase in schools classified with serious weaknesses in Sept-Oct 2003 compared to Sept-Oct 2002.**

Paul asked "Is this because of the Chief Inspectors new rule that satisfactory was dissatisfactory?" David Bell replied that 'it was too early to confirm the trend.'

Commenting later Paul said "Either ten years of Ofsted and league tables is resulting in more schools than ever getting worse and failing or Ofsted's strange use of the English Language is going to be bad news for the 22% of Secondary schools and 19% of Primary schools that Ofsted last year judged to be doing a 'satisfactory' job but will this year be judged to be unsatisfactory".

5<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

## EU MUST ACT FOR DISABLED EQUALITY IN EUROPE

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Disabled People, has urged the European Commission to bring forward a Disability Directive to ensure equality across Europe for disabled people.

Speaking in the debate – *Disabled People's Rights Across Europe and Beyond* - Paul Holmes MP said:

*"There are large gaps in legislation guaranteeing disabled people full access to civil society within the EU. Full and equal access for disabled people is fundamental to the European goal of a 'barrier free Europe.' The European Commission must bring forward a Disability Directive to ensure equality across Europe for disabled people. This means full access to information and education, full access to buildings and public spaces and the outlawing of incitement to hatred on the grounds of disability. From local to international, many groups have a greater role to play to protect disabled peoples rights. Local authorities must be given the power to properly enforce disability anti-discrimination legislation. On the international stage, the UN should commit to establishing a Convention on Disabled People's Rights, guaranteeing equal rights and access for disabled people across the globe."*

22<sup>nd</sup> August 2003

## CREATION OF SINGLE EQUALITY COMMISSION PUTS CART BEFORE HORSE

Commenting on the Ministerial Statement on the proposed creation of a single Commission for Equality and Human Rights, **Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability, Paul Holmes**, said:

*"We welcome the principle behind this proposal. Obviously a Unified Body can provide a clear, single, source of reference on all such issues in place of the existing three separate bodies (dealing with Disability, Race and Gender issues) and the forthcoming three further issues of Age, Religion and Sexual Orientation. However, much will depend on the detail of how the proposed Single Commission is to work. The confused mess of current equality law must also be replaced by a Single Equality Act before a single Commission is introduced, otherwise the Government will be indulging in a classic case of putting the cart before the horse. Firstly there is a danger that a Single Commission could see separate areas such as Disability neglected as is said to have happened in the Northern Ireland example. A single Commission should be based upon a 'federal' or umbrella organisational structure, with the six disparate equality strands being given equal standing so that the specialist knowledge and campaigning of existing bodies such as the Disability Rights Commission are not lost. Secondly present law is not only very complex but allows discrimination on grounds of disability which would not be legal on grounds of race or gender. A user friendly Single Equality Act was successfully piloted through the House of Lords this year by Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Lester, the leading Human Rights lawyer. The Government refused to take the measure up however even though 247 MP's signed EDM 1217 which called upon the Government to introduce this legislation this year. "And thirdly a single commission must also be given greater resources and powers to initiate legal action where necessary."* 30<sup>th</sup> October 2003.

## MP SUPPORTS GREEN INITIATIVES

**Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes**, has submitted a Parliamentary motion congratulating the new Liberal Democrat council on securing Government funding for the installation of solar energy panels on the roof of the Queen's Park Sports Centre in addition to its other green initiatives of funding the Dunston Innovation Centre's geothermic heating and cooling system and opposing the growing and use of genetically-modified foods.

The motion recognises Chesterfield Council's commitment to sustainability and taking the lead on environmental issues. The Council is also providing the extra funding needed for the project which will pay for itself within ten years, making a profit for Chesterfield Council Tax payers for another thirty years – all while protecting the environment. Paul commented: *“This project is not only benefiting the environment but will also benefit local Council Tax payers for many years to come. It is a very welcome move in pushing ‘green’ initiatives further up the local agenda. In addition to its other green initiatives, securing this funding yet again shows Chesterfield Council's commitment to creating an environmentally and economically sustainable local community. I fully support the new Liberal Democrat Council in leading the way on ‘green’ issues and in its hope that by installing this renewable energy technology on a high profile building like our Sports Centre, interest will be stimulated and other people will be encouraged to consider similar installations.”* 4<sup>th</sup> November 2003

## ON THE JOB TRAINING failure creates skills Gap

Responding to the Adult Learning Inspectorates figures on the failure of on the job training schemes **Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work Paul Holmes MP**, condemned the Government for allowing 40% of schemes to be ‘blighted’ by poor leadership and management.

**Paul Holmes MP** commented:

*“It is good that the Government have learned from the abject failure of the Individual Learning Accounts scheme. The lack of quality control provided a ‘cowboys charter’ and led to flagrant abuse of the scheme and its overnight closure at a loss of millions of pounds of taxpayers money. At least the LSC are taking action against cowboy providers of poor quality work based training. Such low quality provision undermines the work of JobcentrePlus and feeds suspicion that the Government is more interested in massaging the unemployment figures than in providing real solutions and quality training. Shoddy ‘training schemes’ not only defraud the taxpayer but defraud the would-be trainee and bring back memories of the worst days of the Youth Training Schemes. The Government must do more to ensure that these training schemes improve the skills of participants and increase their employability”.* 18<sup>th</sup> November 2003

Note:

The Annual Learning Inspectorate's Annual Report published today found that 46% of schemes were failing – an improvement on the 60% found to be failing last year. Some 40% of organisations that provided training at work were ‘blighted’ by poor leadership and management. 95% of work based learning for young people or contractors for JobcentrePlus were awarded the lowest grades by inspectors. The Learning and Skills council was praised for withdrawing contracts from providers who were not delivering high standards.

## PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITY TRAPPED IN LONG STAY HOSPITALS AS FUNDING FALLS SHORT

Responding to the Turning Point progress report on the Government's 'Valuing People' White Paper on learning disability services **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability** condemned the Government for forcing over 750 people with learning difficulties to remain in long stay hospitals.

The White Paper was introduced in 2001 and had the aim of closing the remaining long stay hospitals by April 2004. Yet 752 people with learning difficulties remain in such hospitals with Turning Point estimating that 16 will still be open at April 2004 with 5 having no adequate plans to close by April 2005.

Paul Holmes commented:

*"I voiced concerns in the debate on the 'Valuing People' paper that the vagueness over funding would undermine the significant pledges made within it. Now as the target date of April 2004 approaches hundreds of people are still unable to gain their independence and live within the community. Having willed the end the Government have shown they are not prepared to will the means by providing the financial resources that are necessary to fulfil the Paper's aim of closing all long stay hospitals. Health Minister Stephen Ladyman MP has denied that the funding is not there to achieve the target. However the Turning Point report clearly shows that the money is not being provided and the Government is not taking action to make sure people trapped in these hospitals are freed. Independence and choice in one's living arrangements, where possible, are fundamental to the White Paper's four key principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion. The Government must take action to ensure its proposals are not only high on principle but also properly*

26<sup>th</sup> November 2003

Notes: In the September/October issue of Viewpoint Magazine Health Minister, Stephen Ladyman MP, responding to suggestions of a need for a detailed re-evaluation of costs, commenting: "I believe money [to close long stay hospitals] was put in – whether it was spent on the right people is another matter...Of course there is always an issue with resources. The reason why we gave the money to PCT's is because we expect them to make decisions about spending based on their own local priorities. We're not going to try to determine those priorities from Whitehall." The Turning Point Report 'Time to Move on' was published on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

## QUESTIONS ON BROKEN MANIFESTO PROMISES 'SNOTTY AND UNWORTHY OF A SELECT COMMITTEE' SNAPS MINISTER

Commenting on today's meeting, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Member of the Education and Skills Select Committee, said it revealed the depth of Government concern over the likely defeat of its 'Top Up Fees' legislation when a Government Minister lost his cool in the face of Select Committee questioning on the issue prior to this afternoon's Queens Speech debate.

Alan Johnson was asked by Paul Holmes MP, about the 2001 Labour Manifesto promise not to introduce differential fees and to legislate to prevent them being introduced. His response was that "such a question was not worthy of a Select Committee" and he later snapped that it was "a snotty question."

Paul said afterwards:

**'Government Ministers don't seem to regard misleading the public at two elections as a serious issue worthy of answering to a Select Committee for. No wonder the electorate have lost faith in politicians and say they cannot be trusted. In 1997 Tony Blair said he had no plans to introduce Tuition Fees and three months later he not only introduced them but scrapped Grants for poorer students too. In 2001 his Government said they would prevent Top Up Fees being introduced and two years later they are seeking to introduce them. Parliamentary language describes this as being 'economical with the truth' but in my constituency of Chesterfield people are blunter and call it telling lies. I think Ministers should be held to account on these issues, otherwise they might think they can get away with anything - such as falsely claiming a country has WMD as a pretext for an illegal invasion!.'**

Paul also reminded the Minister that he had - at great length- asked his predecessor Margaret Hodge to reveal to the Committee the detailed costings that the DfES and Treasury had produced when looking at the alternative funding methods for the expansion of Higher Education. She had refused, but now 157 Labour MP's had signed a Motion in Parliament calling for precisely the same information to be made available in order to inform public debate on the alternatives to Top Up Fees. Paul asked if the new Minister would take more notice of 157 members of his party than the previous one had done of the Select Committee. 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003

## TRAINING AND ENTERPRISE COUNCIL ACCOUNTS STILL NOT AVAILABLE AFTER TWO YEARS

At today's Education and Skills Select Committee hearing, **Liberal Democrat MP Paul Holmes** challenged the Minister (Ivan Lewis) to produce the expenditure figures for the last year of the TEC's 2000-2001 saying:

**"We have heard much from the LSC and Ministers about how the LSC is more efficient and cheaper than its predecessor bodies such as the TEC's, but it is impossible to tell if this is true because the consolidated accounts for the TEC's for 2001 are still not available according to a Ministerial reply to a question of mine on 27/10/03."**

Ivan Lewis said he would write with a reply which Paul welcomed in light of the non answer received from him a few weeks earlier[See Notes to Editors]. Speaking after the meeting Paul said, *"this is a large chunk of public money and we should be able to see how much was spent and what on. We need this information to hold the TEC's to account but also to test the Government claim that the LSC is more cost effective than its predecessors."* Paul also challenged the Minister over the funding shortfall in FE spending quoting London Colleges who were short of £5 million for their development plans over the next three years. The national LSC initially allocated just £1.5 million for these purposes, later increased to £3 million but still 40% short of what is needed. After Paul said, **"I asked Mark Haysom the new Chief Executive of the LSC at a recent All Party Parliamentary Group Meeting, about the estimated £1Billion national shortfall in FE funding over the next three years. His reply was that he was too new in the job to be able to comment! It is outrageous that the people in charge of spending such huge sums of public money, be they Ministers or Chief Executives of the largest QUANGO in Britain, can constantly evade accountability on these issues."** 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003

Notes: PQ Answer HC Deb 27 Oct 2003 :Column 83W

**Paul Holmes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 1 September 2003, *Official Report*, column 774W, on the Training and Enterprise Council, when he intends to publish the consolidated accounts for the Training and Enterprise Councils for 2001; and if he will make a statement. [132858]

**Mr. Ivan Lewis:** Only the TECs who operated Group structures produced consolidated accounts for the period April 2000 to March 2001, copies of these are held by the Department. The Department has only ever provided aggregate TEC/CCTE Income and Expenditure Accounts (for England and Wales). The last set covering 1999–2000 were published and laid in the House on March 2002. Due to reduced resources within the TEC network and the work being undertaken by many of them prior to entering liquidation, there was insufficient information available within the necessary timescale to provide the aggregate Income and Expenditure account for April 00 to March 01.

## SCRAPPING PENSION BOOK MEANS 4391 FEWER CUSTOMERS FOR LOCAL POST OFFICES

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat parliamentary spokesperson for Work and Pensions, today revealed new figures showing that local post offices will lose up to 4391 customers, as pensioners will in future collect their entitlement at banks and building societies.

The figures have been produced by the independent House of Commons library, and show that the Government's plan to scrap the pension book will result in a massive loss of revenue for the post office network.

The Government is writing to all pensioners and benefit claimants who pick up their money at the post office and telling them to choose one of three 'direct payment' options. The new figures show that, nationwide, up to 10 million people who get their money at the post office, including 2,850,000 pension book users, will in future get their money from a bank or building society. The exodus will mean post offices are robbed of vital income as they receive a fee for processing each benefit payment. Many pensioners have reported being talked into signing up for new bank accounts and internal Government documents reveal that staff are under pressure to push to customers into taking this 'cheap' option. Paul Holmes said:

*"Millions of pensioners chose to have a pension book. The Government is now telling them to think again. Heavy handed tactics will create a mass exodus of pensioners out of the post office and into the high street banks. The plans will rob the post office network of vital revenue and will accelerate the rate of closures. Many of the pensioners who want to stick with the post office could be met with a permanent 'closed' sign. The Government's plans are driven by cost-cutting and not what is best for pensioners. Many, particularly older pensioners are comfortable with what they know. They have no desire to change. It is not too late for the Government to think again and allow pensioners to hang onto their pension books."*

9th December 2003

### Notes

Today (Tuesday 9th December) Steve Webb MP and a delegation of Liberal Democrat MPs presented a 12,000 signature strong petition from their long-running 'Save Our Pension Book' campaign to No. 10 Downing Street.

The Government's Payment Modernisation Programme involves writing to all pension and benefit claimants who do not have their money paid directly into a bank or building society account. The 'invitation' offers three payment options 1) Direct into a normal bank or building society account 2) Direct into a new basic bank account, and 3) Directly into a Post Office Card Account. Pensioners are NOT being given the option of retaining their pension books.

The Government's programme is running over a two year period and aims to convert all those invited by April 2005. The new figures commissioned from the independent House of Commons Library are based on the responses from pensioners and benefit claimants who have already received the Government's 'invitation'. The new figures predict the outcomes when the Government's programme is completed in 2005.

The new figures show that by 2005, 16.4 million pension and benefit recipients will be 'invited' to opt for one of the direct payment options. The figures show that the post office will lose up to 10.12 million customers – they will opt for a bank or building society account. The remainder – 6.28 million customers will opt for either the Post Office Card Account or will be covered by the Government's 'exceptions service' which will allow cash to be collected from the post office.

Of the 16.4 million benefit recipients who will be approached 5.6 million of them will be pension book users. The Library figures predict that 2.85 million of them will opt for a normal bank or building society account and that 2.75 million of them will opt for either the Post Office Card Account or will qualify for the exceptions service. Therefore the post office could lose out on revenue from up to 2.85 million customers.

The Post Office will not receive any revenue from customers who withdraw their cash from a normal bank or building society account via the provider's branch, nor will they receive revenue from customers who opt for a basic bank account and get their money from the bank or building society that provides the account. The post office will receive a fee for customers who are able and choose to access the money via a basic bank account at the post office. NOTE the Government does not know how many customers who have provided their bank details are opting for normal or basic accounts.

An internal DWP document states "In order to meet Business Case requirements we need to move quickly toward getting 9 out of 10 customers who make a new claim onto Direct Payment. Any further delay will cause overwhelming backlog in 2004/05 impacting on field performance...we also need to pay most of these customers into bank accounts which cost 1p rather than into Post Office card accounts which cost at least 30 times more...emphasis[e] Post Office [card accounts] is probably not the best option for customers.

The new figures also show that very large numbers of pension and benefit claimants are not responding to the Government's 'invitation'. Of the 6,553,600 pension and benefit customers who have been asked to respond to the invitation, only 4,686,339 have so far done so.

## DRAFT DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION BILL WELCOME YET WEAKNESSES REMAIN

Responding to the Draft Disability Discrimination Bill published today Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability, welcomed the piecemeal steps proposed in the Draft Bill, but expressed concern that despite the proposals many of the criticisms remain.

Paul Holmes commented: "Firstly, what guarantees can the Government offer that these measures will become law rather than being 'lost' as the next General Election approaches? It is suggested that pre legislative scrutiny will be complete by the end of May 2004. Is this a firm timescale and does it allow time in a crowded legislative programme to complete passage of an Act between May and November 2004?"

"If not and the final Bill is only introduced in the November 2004 Queen's Speech then there is a grave danger that the incomplete Bill would fall due to a likely General Election in Spring 2005.

"This failure would be entirely due to the Governments laggardly approach in not introducing this Draft Bill as a priority in 2001 or 2002 as Disability Organisations had been led to expect.

"Secondly, there remains the problem that these piecemeal measures simply add to the already eye watering complex maze of legislation.

"As the Government Statement says "The Disability Discrimination Bill when passed, combined in particular with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Pensions) Regulations 2003 and the Disability Discrimination (Blind and Partially Sighted Persons) Regulations 2003 will....." Single Equality Legislation such as that piloted through the House of Lords this year by leading Civil Rights lawyer, Liberal Democrat Lord Lester, would cut through this enormously complex mish mash of legislation and make the enforcement of Disability and other Rights much simpler than the present lawyers minefield.

"Despite the support shown in the House of Commons for this approach with 247 MP's signing EDM 1217 which called upon the Government to introduce this legislation this year the Government refuses to adopt this approach." 3rd December 2003

## OVER ¾ MILLION MANUFACTURING JOBS LOST SINCE LABOUR CAME TO POWER

759,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost since Labour came to power according to House of Commons library figures commissioned by the Liberal Democrats.

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said:

*“The manufacturing sector is sinking fast while the Government sits idly by. The Government has given up the fight to save manufacturing jobs and has left in the lurch the families dependent on those jobs to survive. Claims of record employment levels cannot mask the continuing decline in the manufacturing sector.”*

17<sup>th</sup> December 2003

1. Figures compiled by the House of Commons library and commissioned by the Liberal Democrats

### Workforce jobs, United Kingdom Seasonally adjusted

Manufacturing		All jobs	jobs	thousands	thousands
	Jun-97	28,179	4,493	Sep-97	28,123
4,462	Dec-97	28,238	4,489	Mar-98	28,435
4,529	Jun-98	28,389	4,523	Sep-98	28,423
4,499	Dec-98	28,560	4,443	Mar-99	28,667
4,385	Jun-99	28,860	4,353	Sep-99	28,959
4,308	Dec-99	29,031	4,296	Mar-00	29,104
4,268	Jun-00	29,271	4,229	Sep-00	29,314
4,178	Dec-00	29,390	4,130	Mar-01	29,429
4,103	Jun-01	29,495	4,053	Sep-01	29,459
4,001	Dec-01	29,509	3,956	Mar-02	29,524
3,905	Jun-02	29,491	3,881	Sep-02	29,517
3,837	Dec-02	29,564	3,802	Mar-03	29,646
3,785	Jun-03	29,716	3,752	Sep-03	29,779

3,734 change Jun 97 -Sept 03 1,600 -759 Source:ONS

2. A link to the Office for National Statistics website showing employment figures including the latest manufacturing job losses. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/lmsuk1203.pdf>

## GOVERNMENT GOT ITS SCHOOL SUMS WRONG AND THEN BLAMED OTHERS

Welcoming the publication of the Education and Skills Select Committee's report on Public Expenditure, Paul Holmes, Liberal Democrat Member of the Committee said :

"This report highlights yet another example of Government incompetence, mismanagement and spin."

"First, in autumn 2002, the spin doctors promised a record financial settlement for schools for the 2003-2004 financial year. But, David Normington Permanent Secretary at the DfES admitted to the Committee, they didn't even realise until they faced a barrage of criticism at a Heads Conference in March 2003, that they had got their sums completely wrong.

“They had for example failed to fully account for the increase in employers pension contributions of 5.15%, the employer's NI contributions of 1% and the increased staff costs resulting from the shortening of the pay scale.

"Next they tried to deflect criticism from themselves for the ensuing job losses, increased pupil teacher ratios and plundering of money designated for repairing leaky roofs. **It is significant that for the first time in 20 years the Government have not published a national summary of the latest figures on pupil teacher ratios - what are they hiding? Liberal Democrat research into the statistics for London LEA's reveals that for some areas Secondary school ratios are the worst since 1991 and some Primary are the worst since 1974**

**"To his shame Charles Clarke tried to pass the buck by blaming LEA's for not pass porting the Government largesse through to schools.** But the LGA provided evidence to the Committee refuting this. In fact just 11 out of 150 LEA's had not pass ported the money through while most actually spend more on schools than the Government provides. Of the 11 remaining, David Normington admitted to the Committee, that there was ' little correlation between non pass porting authorities and the areas where most schools were reporting financial difficulties.

"The Government still do not know the true scale of the job losses that resulted from their mismanagement. They will not restore the money that some schools had to divert from urgent repairs to keeping teachers in front of classes and many schools wiped out any reserves they had to keep on an even keel this year. **Yet the planned future increases in year on year resources of 5.7% is less than the level that plunged so many schools into difficulties this year.** 18th December 2003