

Paul Holmes MP Press and Speech Archive 2004

GOVERNMENT SIDESTEPS KEY POINTS OF REPORT ON PUPIL ACHIEVEMENT 8 January 2004

Commenting today on the Government's Response to the Education and Skills Select Committee's Report on 'Secondary Education: Pupil Achievement' Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat member of the Committee said the response sidesteps key points raised in evidence to the committee. The main points were: that poverty is the single biggest determinant of low educational achievement, that the emphasis on League Table results did not allow for this and worked counter to supposed Government policies on social inclusion, that the blame culture based on these League Tables deters teachers from working in schools serving deprived communities which therefore enter a vicious cycle of relying on temporary, supply and temporary overseas teachers, rather than attracting a stable and motivated workforce. The Committee was also critical of overlapping and often short term schemes which, like Education Action Zones, were introduced and then scrapped with little evidence of systematic evaluation by the Government. Paul added: *"These key issues of poverty and 'sink' schools serving deprived communities are hardly helped by the flagship Government scheme of Specialist schools which carry a £50,000 entry fee and so deter access to most of the schools that are most in need of the extra status and financial resources that being a Specialist School brings.*

"Creating a competitive market led approach in schools has the same negative affect that is now anticipated with the introduction of Foundation Hospitals in the NHS and Top up Fees in Higher Education. A clear trend in Government policy is apparent."

CHESTERFIELD MP PRAISES LOCAL ORGANISATION FOR ITS WORK IN ASSISTING FORMER DRUG USERS BACK TO WORK Jan 2004

Speaking in a debate in Parliament, **Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes**, praised the work of Phoenix Enterprises in implementing the Progress2Work scheme to help former drug users to return to employment.

Paul, who opened Phoenix's offices in Chesterfield, told the Minister:

"This is a welcome and much needed initiative and Phoenix in their Derbyshire operation are among the best out of 77 schemes around the country. Inevitably the Government are not supporting the scheme enough. Phoenix has £345 per client on this scheme to help them get back into work instead of returning to their old habits, committing crime to fund their addiction and eventually going back to jail. Yet it costs £35,000 to keep a burglar in jail for a year. Two thirds of burglars go on to re-offend after release, many because they go straight back to addiction and crime."

Thursday 8th January 2004

Extract from Debate Westminster Hall 7th January 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing the debate. There are two general background issues that should be considered before we consider progress2work. One is how we perceive the drug problem as a whole. Unlike alcohol or nicotine, for a long time, drug addiction has been seen as a crime rather than an illness, especially from the 1970s onwards, when GPs were prevented from prescribing heroin to addicts. There has been some improvement in that attitude, and all credit to the current Government for taking some steps in that direction. I shall return to that point later. There is also the question of the new deal framework, within which progress2work is one of many different schemes. One of the many criticisms of the new deal is that it has primarily dealt with the easy to place. Many reports—from the Public Accounts Committee, the National Audit Office and internal research at the Department for Work and Pensions—have indicated that many of those who have got jobs under the new deal would have got those jobs anyway during a 10-year period of constant economic growth. New deal resources have also been dissipated in the blanket interviews that were introduced for invalidity benefit claimants and single parents. The new deal has been criticised for ignoring the hard to place, such as disabled people, although the Shaw Trust is doing work for the Department with difficult-to-place disabled people. Now, we have progress2work, which is a step in the right direction— **Mr. Desmond Browne** : I do not want to prevent the hon. Gentleman from rehearsing some of the reasons why his party does not support the new deal, despite its enormous success throughout the country, but progress2work is not a new deal programme. **Paul Holmes** : I thank the Minister for the specific correction. Most people would see progress2work as working in the framework of the new deal. It is interlinked with Jobcentre Plus and the programmes it offers. If it is not a new deal programme, may I suggest that the Government make it a flagship of a new new deal, if they move on from the blanket new deal approach, which most reports indicate is of little practical use. Progress2work is a step in the right direction. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw said that but, as he noted, it is a limited step in the right direction. It concentrates on those whose drug problem is, to a large extent, solved. The problems of people at the end of the cycle of drug addiction, offences, imprisonment, rehabilitation and detoxification are not so severe. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw described eloquently the difference between chaotic and non-chaotic lifestyles among former drug addicts. My constituency of Chesterfield has a great deal in common with Bassetlaw. The town was largely built upon mining, associated engineering and a small amount of associated steel and chemical industry, almost all of which have been completely wiped out during the last two decades. As in Bassetlaw, unemployment is no longer the massive problem that it was in the early 1990s, when the pits were closed overnight, or during the 1980s, but it is still higher than the national average. The problems of drug use in a community such as Chesterfield are found in every community in every part of the town. Similarly, they are found in public schools such as Eton, and in inner-city schools. Drug problems are not confined to one part of the community, but they are at their most intense in areas of traditional social and economic deprivation. During the 1980s

and 1990s, those areas were devastated by mass unemployment. The medical focus on drug addiction emphasises the illness and the detox approach mentioned by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, who referred favourably to the approach in other countries.

A social model of drug addiction would consider matters rather differently. For example, a survey said that 70 per cent. of US servicemen took heroin while they were in Vietnam, but on returning to America and a more stable lifestyle, only 3 per cent. continued taking it. One social condition led to massive drug use in one set of circumstances. Under another social condition, there was almost no drug use later. Similarly, around 1979 to 1983, the number of known, registered drug addicts in the UK trebled. That happened when unemployment doubled from 1.5 million to 3 million. The social model of drug addiction based on those statistics would regard the problem as much more than just a medical illness and addiction.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw spent a lot of time talking about how a certain frame of mind and attitude among communities in Bassetlaw or parts of Chesterfield must be broken. Those communities may no longer have the mass unemployment that triggered the problem in the 1980s and 1990s, but there is still a frame of mind in which there is peer pressure on people, and a loop of drug addiction.

Progress2work in Derbyshire is run by Phoenix Enterprises, which has a number of offices. I had the pleasure of opening its first Derbyshire office in Chesterfield before progress2work was introduced. At that time, Phoenix Enterprises told me that one of the problems of the new deal programmes it was administering was that it could not deal with the most difficult people, such as those with a drug problem. Phoenix argued that because it was a not-for-profit company, it had money of its own that it could recycle, which was not going into profit and, as far back as 2001, it was using its own funds to top up new deal money to send people to private drug rehabilitation programmes before even trying to get them into employment. Such people would normally not have been dealt with.

Andy Ellis is the operations manager for Phoenix Enterprises in Derbyshire. He is a great enthusiast for the progress2work scheme. He says that, from June 2003, when Phoenix Enterprises started in Derbyshire, to December, 116 people started the programme. The success rates have been high compared with some of the examples we have heard from other hon. Members. For example, there is a success rate of about 89 per cent. Some 42 of those 116 people have gone into permanent full-time employment, 32 have gone into full-time further or higher education courses, and 22 are on mainstream Jobcentre Plus training programmes. Andy Ellis's Derbyshire scheme is the fourth most successful of the 44 second phase progress2work schemes, and the 11th most successful of the 75 first and second phase schemes. That is a good example for the Minister to consider. He visited the Phoenix offices in Derby at the start of the scheme. I invite him to visit the Chesterfield offices now that the scheme is under way and well proven after six or seven months. Another success story that Andy quotes is an anonymous one from Derby. An ex-offender who had been in jail due to his drug use and associated crimes went on to do a NVQ level 3 in cookery. The course ran in the evening and he still had an electronic tag, so he could not attend. At that point, he would normally have gone back into the community and ended up reoffending. However, the progress2work scheme found him a placement in a restaurant, which turned into a full-time job, and got him a day off for college in the daytime. The scheme was able to tap into the discretionary fund and bought him a chef's uniform and a set of knives to enable him to start his full-time job. There are other success stories. For example, the scheme has provided people with deposits for a flat, so that they can move away from the peer group pressure of their former friends and neighbours—the people they grew up with—who are trying to get them back into drugs after they have come off them. Then those people can start a new lifestyle and move back into work. Andy Ellis is a great advocate of progress2work. He has, however, pointed out some problems. Many people have multiple issues, including debt, homelessness, health and all sorts of problems, about which we have heard from hon. Members. Andy believes that those problems should be dealt with in a one-stop programme, rather than having to refer people to other programmes for certain difficulties that they face. It would be cheaper; it would be less bureaucratic and it would be less of an obstacle for the individual client. Some drug agencies in Derbyshire will categorically not refer people to the progress2work scheme. Primarily, that is due to funding. If the targets are funding led and a successful outcome means that the funding goes to, say, progress2work Phoenix Enterprises, the drug agency that had the initial referral will lose the funding. Andy Ellis suggests that drug advisory teams, for example, need to introduce referral targets and instructions to work in partnership as part of the allocation of money and contracts. I come now to funding. Andy Ellis has five outreach workers in Derbyshire and says that, at present, he could easily use 10 outreach workers to their full capacity. Again, that may be a step in the right direction. However, as the Minister said earlier, perhaps the argument is that we do not need more of the same. The praise for, and the problems of, the schemes were reflected throughout the country by those who run them. For example, Working Links, which operates several schemes in the south of England, echoed in particular the first point made by Andy Ellis about the multiple issues faced by clients and the problems of having to refer people to different agencies and groups. He said that a one-stop shop approach, such as that in employment zones, would be a much better way in which to deal with such issues. Another difficulty is that Jobcentre Plus managers in different parts of the country interpret the rules or flexibility of the schemes differently. In Derbyshire, the managers work extremely well with progress2work. For example, when someone with a drug problem and a chaotic lifestyle has had to drop out of a training course for a while, Jobcentre Plus in Derbyshire has waived the imposition of sanctions. I have been told that Jobcentre Plus managers in other parts of the country are not always so liberal in their interpretation of the rules concerning the imposition of sanctions. My conclusions are that progress2work is a welcome initiative. As the Minister said, perhaps the call is for more, but not more of the same. When interpreting the way in which regulations are applied, more flexibility is needed from Jobcentre Plus managers throughout the country. A one-stop advisory approach needs to be introduced as opposed to multiple advisors or agencies. To return to the case put by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, more intervention is needed with chronic cases, not just the cases of those who have already reached the end of the process and are mainly rehabilitated already. Ultimately, the scheme needs more money. Where would that come from? The Treasury has a case to look at. For example, to keep the 25,000 extra people in our overcrowded prisons costs £3.5 million a year, which is £35,000 per inmate. Many inmates have been sent to prison for burglary, petty theft and car crime associated with obtaining the money to feed their drug habit. If they do not have work and a settled lifestyle, they will reoffend and be sent back to prison. Andy Ellis receives only £375 per client compared with the £35,000 that it costs to lock up a person. The redistribution of that money would be an obvious way in which to tackle such a major social problem.

LABOUR'S UNPRINCIPLED PLANS TO PLUNGE STUDENTS INTO HIGHER DEBT

Speaking in the Commons debate on the Government's controversial proposals to impose Top Up Fees Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes: Condemned the Government's decision to break its 2001 Manifesto promise never to introduce such fees. Paul said *"No wonder the public increasingly think politicians are liars."*

Drew on his experiences as a Head of Sixth Form in Derbyshire Schools to outline the way in which *"debt and the fear of debt deterred pupils from lower income families from going into Higher Education. A debt of £24-30,000 can do nothing but deter increasing numbers of students"* Paul pointed to the example of the USA & Australia where "the higher the fees go the lower the states contribution falls so that student debt rose but universities were

no better off. In England the 7% extra raised from fees since 1997 has been offset by a 7% cut in funding from Gordon Brown.”

Paul ended by calling upon Labour MPs to join him in voting against Government proposals, in support of Labour’s Manifesto promise never to introduce Top Up Fees and in support of the Liberal Democrat principle that education as an investment for the nation should be paid for out of Progressive Taxation.” Tuesday 27th January 2004

Higher Education Bill Debate 27th January 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): When I made my maiden speech in this Chamber on 21 June 2001, standing on this spot, one of my subjects was my opposition to tuition fees, which I explained by reference to a couple of examples based on my experience.

I was the first member of my family, a family living on a large council estate, ever to go to university. In 1975, with an unemployed father and a mother who was a part-time home help, I could not have considered going to university under the existing tuition fees system. Before being elected in 2001, I worked as a head of sixth form. The hon. Member for Lewisham, West (Jim Dowd) said that he is irritated by the patronising and old-fashioned view that debt deters students from lower-income families from going into higher education. I do not know what job the hon. Gentleman did before he was elected, but I was a teacher for 22 years.

Jim Dowd: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I was an electronics engineer.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab/Co-op): And a good one, as well.

Paul Holmes: Well, for 22 years, I was a teacher—a head of sixth form in the 12 years prior to my election. So I do not believe that my views are old-fashioned, out-of-date or patronising. As a head of sixth form, I taught and advised year 10, 11, 12 and 13 students, trying to persuade the bright working-class kids, first, to stay on to do A-levels or advanced GNVQs, then to consider going on to higher education.

From the point at which the Conservative Government started to reduce the value of the grant, when grants and loans were 50:50, and from 1997, when the Labour Government introduced tuition fees, I saw increasing difficulty, year by year by year, in getting children from that background to consider staying on and going into higher education.

In my maiden speech, I did not talk about variable fees. There had just been a general election and the Government who won it had given a cast-iron guarantee in their manifesto that they would ensure that variable fees were never introduced. There was no small print saying "just for the next year or two"; it was a cast-iron guarantee. For the past two and a half years, I have been a member of the Select Committee on Education and Skills. We have published two reports—in 2002 and 2003—on higher education, funding and related issues. During our hearings and while we were drawing up those reports, I repeatedly made the points from my maiden speech to which I have just referred, but I was told by some of the Labour Members on the Committee that it was anecdotal evidence and could not be taken into account. They said that there was no hard evidence of debt aversion among students from non-traditionally academic families and low-income families.

That puzzled me, as the Select Committee had taken evidence from Scotland—the Cubie report—which referred to that problem and led the Scottish Parliament to abolish tuition fees and reintroduce grants. We took evidence from the Rees report from Wales, which convinced the Welsh Assembly—where, as in the Scottish Parliament, there is a Labour majority—to reintroduce grants and to state that, if it had the power, which London has not given it, it would have abolished tuition fees.

Last year, even more recently, we took evidence from Professor Claire Callendar, about whom we have already heard in the debate. In work commissioned by the Government, she said that there was crystal-clear evidence of debt aversion and fear of debt in relation to the loans that the Government have introduced. We have seen a lot of hard evidence, yet the Government continue to say that there is no proof.

The Government are saying, although they do not use these words, "We accept that we made an abysmal mess of the system in 1997. We introduced tuition fees. We scrapped grants, even though the Dearing report said specifically that they should not be scrapped. We made an abysmal mess and we are going to undo it by removing the up-front element of the fees and restoring grants". The Government expect to be praised for undoing the complete mess that they created six years ago. On top of that, being new Labour, they plan to create a new mess by introducing variable fees.

Variable fees will inevitably increase debt. When the Secretary of State introduced that proposal, he said that the average student attending a university charging fees of £3,000 a year would leave with a debt of about

£24,000. We heard earlier that Barclays bank estimates that the debt would be £30,000. Whether the debt is £24,000 or £30,000, it is a huge deterrent to the people identified as fearful of debt in the Cubie, Rees and Callendar reports.

Variable fees will deter low-income students. Even more important, as many Members have said, variable fees will mean that students who go to university will not make choices based on their academic ability—as they should—but on their ability to pay. They will attend the cheaper universities.

Will variable fees be the thin end of the wedge? Of course they will. When the proposals were announced, the chairman of the Russell group said that they were too little, too late. The vice-chancellor of Brunel university said that universities needed to make increases of more than £3,000. The vice-chancellor of Imperial college said that the college needed to charge £20,000 for medical students and £10,000 a year for other students. Scores of vice-chancellors have made similar comments. There will be vast pressure to increase the fees beyond £3,000.

The Secretary of State tells us not to worry because there will be an independent review three years down the line. In the Select Committee on 14 January, I asked the Secretary of State whether he was saying that there was no alternative to the proposals, and no way, other than through variable fees, of funding higher education to the level needed. In effect, he was telling us to take it or leave it—there was no pick-and-mix approach and if we voted the wrong way the whole Bill would fall. I asked why, if there was no alternative at present, there would be an alternative three years down the line if the independent commission said that the system was a disaster and we should get rid of it. The Secretary of State answered: "I do not believe the review will come to that view".

An independent commission will look into something to which there is no alternative, and the Secretary of State has already decided that it will not come to an adverse decision about the experiment on which the Government are embarking. So what is the point of an independent commission?

We are told to look overseas for examples. Last week, the Education and Skills Committee went to California—not for the beach and the sunshine, as it is winter. We spent a long time in meetings with academics, business men and people from Californian schools. They agreed unanimously that one reason why California, which has a smaller population than Britain, was the fifth largest economy in the world was the massive investment that has been put into higher education since world war two and, especially, since the 1960s. The Conservative party should note that the Californian business men, far from saying that they needed a small, elitist higher education system, were saying that, even though about 60 per cent. of people go into higher education, they wanted more to do so. That is because their economy, one of the most successful in the world, needs more highly educated people, not fewer, as has been suggested by one party.

We were given evidence of variable fees across America. California has the lowest fees in the USA. We were also shown comparative graphs illustrating the numbers of students from low-income families going to university in the different states. We can predict what those graphs showed—although the Secretary of State appears not to agree—which was that, in the states with the highest fees, the lowest number of students from low-income families went to university. Similarly, the states with the lowest fees, such as California, attracted the highest number of such students.

PAUL ENCOURAGES BUSINESS TO DEMONSTRATE MANUFACTURING EXCELLENCE

Paul Holmes MP is urging manufacturers in Chesterfield to test their competitiveness in the marketplace by entering the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) Manufacturing Excellence Awards (MX2004). Now in its 25th year, the Manufacturing Excellence Awards examines UK manufacturer' competitiveness in best practice and innovation across six industrial disciplines: customer focus; product innovation; process innovation; resource efficiency; people effectiveness and IT.

All manufacturing companies based in the UK are eligible to enter, no matter their size, and there is a special award to encourage SME's to grow and prosper. Further more, to ensure UK manufacturing remains a world leader in quality and service, the IMechE is offering to all companies that apply a free confidential benchmarking report to ensure they are performing to the acknowledged standards of best practice. Entrance to the MX2004 is free and supported by a prestigious group of organisations including the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI), the EEF, the Manufacturing Advisory Service and the Manufacturing Foundation. Paul said: **“Manufacturing is vitally important to the UK economy. Not only does it account for 20% of GDP, but the UK cannot continue to compete in the international marketplace relying on services industries alone. Awards such as these reward the hard work and efforts of all those in manufacturing in the UK. Chesterfield has a long history of**

manufacturing excellence, of which I am proud, and therefore I encourage those involved to enter the Manufacturing Excellence Awards to receive the recognition of excellence they deserve.”

Tuesday 14th January 2004 Notes: The manufacturing sector employs people in every county across the UK, and in certain regions it is the major employer. Manufacturing is at the heart of the UK plc. It generates two-thirds of the value of the UK's exports, directly employs over 4million people and accounts for 20% of GDP.

The Awards will be presented in June 2004, at an evening ceremony at the Dorchester Hotel, London. All entrants receive a free, confidential benchmarking study against best practice. For more information about MX2004, please contact Stephanie Levin at the IMechE on 0207 304 6815 or visit the website <http://www.mx2004.org>

TOP UP FEES LEAVE STUDENTS IN MASSIVE DEBT AND UNIVERSITIES NO BETTER OFF

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Member of the Education and Skills Select Committee, today challenged Charles Clarke MP, Secretary of State for Education, over the Government plan to charge £3,000 Top Up Fees.

Paul told the House: *“Many members even those who with a heavy heart are going to do as the Whips tell them, fear that this £3,000 is the thin end of the wedge. Many fear that fees will soar in the future to the astronomical levels seen in the USA. The Vice-Chancellor of Imperial College, London, has said only this week that he wants to charge £10,000 per year to all students and £20,000 studying medicine.”*

Afterwards Paul commented that: *“Many Vice-Chancellors and the champions of the Russell Group have said that £3,000 is too low and should be increased. Yet Vice-Chancellor Dr Peter Knight told me at a Select Committee hearing last year 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. So students will have debts of £20-30,000, they will select universities according to their ability to pay rather than their academic ability yet the universities will be no better off in the end.”* Thursday 8th January 2004

PAUL PRAISES WORK OF LOCAL ORGANISATIONS IN HELPING SICK AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ACCESS SUPPORT

Speaking in a debate on ‘Difficulties in claiming sickness and disability benefits’ Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes praised the local Citizens Advice Bureau and Unemployed Workers’ Centres for their work in helping sick and disabled people

navigate the complex network of benefits they are eligible and supporting them in appeals against benefit decisions.

Paul commented:

“The system is so complicated that there is an industry to help people to unravel it. In Chesterfield we are assisted by the very hard work of the Chesterfield Citizens Advice Bureaux and in many areas there are excellent unemployed workers' centres, which pick up much of the work.

“A report by Citizens Advice Scotland tells of a case where a local DWP employee stated that it was not the responsibility of front-desk staff to advise people on their entitlement, even though that is the first port of call for

almost everyone. Organisations such as the local Citizens Advice and Unemployed Workers’ Centre fill these gaps and provide the vital support people need to realise what benefits they are eligible for and how to apply for them.

“Without these organisations many people would fail to pick up the wide variety of complex benefits which they

are eligible for, and without which they would struggle to achieve a decent level of existence.”

Wednesday 4th February 2004

Notes

Adjournment Debate ‘Difficulties in claiming sickness and disability benefits’ 3 Feb 2004 : Column 208WH (Westminster Hall) Based on a report by Citizens Advice Scotland ‘Riding the Benefits Roller-coaster CABx clients’ experiences of claiming sickness and disability benefits’ December 2003

PAUL TOASTS BIGGEST ALL DAY BREAKFAST -10/02/04

Chesterfield MP Paul Holmes MP tucked into a healthy breakfast at the House of Commons on Tuesday 10th February alongside fellow MPs, as part of Cancer Research UK’s Britain’s Biggest All Day Breakfast.

On Friday 12th March, Cancer Research UK hopes that thousands of people throughout the country will follow suit and host their own breakfast party for friends, family and colleagues.

This is now the sixth year that Britain’s leading cancer charity has been holding Britain’s All Day Breakfast and the event has been growing all the time. The aim is to raise vital funds for its pioneering cancer research as well as

raising awareness about the importance of a healthy breakfast as a step towards good health. This year the charity hopes to raise over £250,000.

Paul Holmes MP said:

“I was delighted to join my parliamentary colleagues to support Cancer Research UK’s Britain’s Biggest All Day Breakfast. Lots of us skip breakfast from time to time but it’s one of the most important meals of the day. By holding a breakfast party at work or at home you can kick start your day with a healthy breakfast and raise money for a great cause at the same time.”

Dr Lesley Walker Cancer Research UK’s Director of Cancer Information says:

“It is great that so many MPs have joined us to help launch Britain’s Biggest All Day Breakfast. The event is a great chance to catch up with friends and family and it’s very easy to organise. On 12th March we hope thousands of people across the country will once again be waking up to a healthy breakfast and donating to Cancer Research UK as they do so.”

Notes to Editors: For Media Inquiries please contact Cancer Research UK’s Public Affairs team on 02070618360.

GOVERNMENT MUST COMPENSATE THOSE FALLING THROUGH PENSION PROTECTION SCHEME GAP- 10/02/04

Speaking in the House of Commons yesterday, **Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield**, pushed Minister for Work and Pensions Malcolm Wicks MP to include in the proposed Pensions Bill compensation for workers who lost their pensions between 1997 and 2000 but will not be covered by the pension protection scheme.

Paul Holmes said:

“The fund offers nothing to people who lost their pensions between 1997 and 2000, such as constituents of mine who works for Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite Products Ltd. Can the Minister not offer any hope of compensation to such people, especially those who worked in the steel industry and were compelled by the Government to make payments into their pensions?”

Holmes was one of several MPs challenging the Minister to include more support for workers whose state required occupational pension schemes collapsed during the 1990s. This is the latest exchange in a three year battle for recognition of the government’s obligation to support workers affected.

After the debate Paul commented:

“The Government was warned in 2000 of the looming crisis with occupational pensions and recommended a scheme be implemented to protect pensioners, those still paying into pensions, and their families. To date, the Government’s proposed scheme offers nothing to people who lost their pensions between 1997 and 2000. The upcoming Pensions Bill is an opportunity for the Government to provide for those they have let down. ”

Notes HC Deb 9th February Column 1114

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): When the pension protection fund is introduced, hopefully in 2005, it will be welcome, but it would have been more welcome if it had been introduced as long ago as 2000, when Ros Altmann, a former Government adviser, warned of the coming crisis and urged the adoption of such a scheme. However, as we have heard, the fund offers nothing to people who lost their pension between 1997 and 2000, such as constituents of mine who worked for Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite Products Ltd. Can the Minister not offer any hope of compensation to such people, especially those who worked in the steel industry and were compelled by the Government to make payments into their pension?

Malcolm Wicks: The Secretary of State and I have already answered those questions, and I did so again just now. We are listening to sensible suggestions, and have met concerned MPs, their constituents and affected workers. We cannot say anything at this stage because we do not want to offer false hope, but we are listening very carefully.

41,000 MORE PEOPLE OF WORKING AGE WITHOUT WORK IN EAST MIDLANDS SINCE LABOUR CAME TO POWER -

11/02/04 41,000 more people have become economically inactive in the East Midlands since 1997 with 249,000 more nationally according to figures released today by the Liberal Democrats.

Over half a million people of working age are without work in the East Midlands with more than 270,000 of them 18-24 year olds.

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

“Millions of people have been betrayed by this Labour Government. It’s shocking that so many young people have been ignored and sidelined. The Government shouts about how well it is managing employment levels but turns a blind eye to the millions of working age who are not working. There are shocking numbers of people who are not working and not in the Government’s official unemployment figures. This may be evidence that benefit sanctions only drive people towards the black market. The New Deal is in dire need of reform. Forcing people to jump through hoops is not the answer to youth unemployment.”

Today's ONS figures reveal that there are now 528,000 economically inactive people of working age in the East Midlands. The figure has increased from 487,000 in May 1997 to the current 528,000 - an increase of 41,000. The largest yearly increase for any age group has been the 18-24 year olds (the group covered by the New Deal for Young People).

For this group, the economically active figure has increase by 16,000 to a total of 276,000. The Government defines 'economically inactive' as "People who are neither in *employment* nor *unemployed*."

This includes those who want a job but have not been seeking work in the last four weeks, those who want a job and are seeking work but not available to start work, and those who do not want a job.

GOVERNMENT HAS MORAL DUTY TO COMPENSATE THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR PROMISED PENSION - 11/02/04

The Government's Pension Bill, published today, is half baked, Paul Holmes, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions , said today.

The main proposals within the Bill include a Pension Protection Fund to protect company pension schemes and more provision to enable people to retire later.

Paul Holmes MP said:

“As it stands the Pension Bill is half baked. The Pension Protection Fund is an insurance scheme not based on risk. It's like asking a careful driver to pay the same as a boy racer. To ask all companies to pay the same punishes the good guys. There is nothing in these proposals to help the tens of thousands who have already lost all or part of their promised company pension. I have campaigned since 2001 for the three Chesterfield companies – Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite Products Ltd, whose employees have lost their pensions, to receive some compensation. The Government, having stonewalled on this for years, are now taking action. Yet it is still ignoring the plight of those not covered by the proposed protection scheme. The Government has a moral duty to compensate them. As Shadow Minister I am looking to be a member of the Committee on the Bill as it makes its way through the House of Commons. I will certainly campaign for those losing out in the Bill to be compensated.”

NEARLY 8 MILLION OF WORKING AGE WITHOUT WORK -

11/02/04

New employment figures out today being trumpeted by the Government as the ‘best labour market for a generation’ ignores the eight million people of working age who are not working.

Government records for the ‘economically inactive’, defined by the Government as people who are neither in *employment* nor *unemployed*, show that numbers have reached 7.8million people – up by 249,000 since 1997. The largest yearly increase for any age group has been the 18-24 year olds (the group covered by the New Deal for Young People). For this group, the economically active figure has increase by 82,000 to a total of 1,324,000.

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

“Millions of people have been betrayed by this Labour Government. It’s shocking that so many young people have been ignored and sidelined. The Government shouts about how well it is managing employment levels but turns a blind eye to the millions of working age who are not working. There are shocking numbers of people who are not working and not in the Government’s official unemployment figures. This may be evidence that benefit sanctions only drive people towards the black market. The New Deal is in dire need of reform. Forcing people to jump through hoops is not the answer to youth unemployment.”

Notes

Today's ONS figures reveal that there are now 7,848,000 economically inactive people of working age in the UK. The figure has increased from 7,599,000 in May 1997 to the current 7,848,000 - an increase of 249,000.

The largest yearly increase for any age group has been the 18-24 year olds (the group covered by the New Deal for Young People). For this group, the economically active figure has increase by 82,000 to a total of 1,324,000. The Government defines 'economically inactive' as "People who are neither in *employment* nor *unemployed*. This includes those who want a job but have not been seeking work in the last four weeks, those who want a job and are seeking work but not available to start work, and those who do not want a job.

CUTS MUST NOT BE AT COST OF DELIVERY 17th March 2004

Commenting on Gordon Brown's proposed job cuts in the Department of Work and Pensions, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said: *“While we recognise the need to make the civil service more efficient, the Chancellor's 30,000 job cuts in the DWP must not be at the cost of delivering benefits and delivering help in finding work for the most deprived and vulnerable members of our community. Training for Job Centre Plus staff has been cut despite the heavy caseload and changing and complex benefit regulations. Quality support for jobseekers cannot be delivered on the cheap by over-worked and under trained staff.”*

Draft Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I, too, support and welcome this uprating. It is a shame that it is the first one since 2001, but it makes up for that time lag. Inevitably, however, some people whose claims were dealt with in the interim have lost out slightly, because of the delayed uprating. I understand that the Government have made a commitment that, from now on, there will be an annual uprating, but perhaps the Minister will clarify that. Obviously, such a measure would remove the difficulty that we have had with a time lag since 2001.

The regulations deal with a major and growing problem. Hon. Members have referred to the fact that the number of cases is increasing considerably. In 1968, for example, there were 153 deaths from mesothelioma, but there were 1,631 in 2000 and 1,848 in 2001. The number is expected to level off at about 2,500 per year, reaching a peak, the Government suggest, in 2011 to 2015, but other estimates suggest that that may happen in 2030. The disease is a major and growing problem with an ageing work force. It is a lung disease that takes a long time to develop, but which, once developed, can kill very quickly—within 12 to 18 months—and it is a problem that will be with us for a long time. The 1979 Act was a major and welcome step forward, and the uprating that has been announced in this Committee is another such welcome step. That said, I have a number of specific questions about the workings of the Act, about the way benefits are claimed and paid and about the way compensation is claimed and paid under the Act. For these questions, I am particularly indebted to the trade union safety team, or TRUST, which is based in my constituency of Chesterfield and does a lot of work in this field. It launched an asbestos campaign group for the region, whose inaugural meeting in my constituency I was pleased to attend. As a result of its day-to-day work with claimants, TRUST has raised a number of detailed questions about the workings of the scheme. First, to claim compensation under the scheme, the person must already be claiming industrial injuries disablement benefit. The difficulty is that if someone is awarded IIDB, they can lose some of their income from benefits elsewhere. It can be clawed back, unlike for example, the disability living allowance. As a result of working with people in Chesterfield

and the surrounding area in north Derbyshire, the team feels that some people are put off claiming IIDB in the first place because that may be offset against other benefits. However, that means that they cannot go to lodge a claim for compensation under the 1979 Act. TRUST feels strongly that if IIDB were treated in the same way as the DLA and not clawed back against other benefits, or if the requirement that someone must be claiming IIDB before they can make a claim under the 1979 Act were removed, that would remove an obstacle to making such claims. The team makes other specific points. For example, there is no real provision for increasing the allowance owing to a change of circumstance. A sufferer's condition can deteriorate very quickly after diagnosis, and an initial low IIDB assessment may not be appropriate when the condition worsens quickly. Is it possible to adjust the workings of the 1979 Act so that the payment can be increased to take account of a change in circumstances? Under the 1979 Act, compensation can be awarded to a spouse, partner, dependent child under 21 or another relative who is classified as a child under other criteria. In civil law compensation—and the Government hope that most claimants will claim under civil law from their former employer or insurers—the compensation is not limited in that way. TRUST feels that the 1979 Act payments should be extended beyond the limited scope that the Government currently apply. That could best be done by making payments directly to the deceased's estate when there are no immediate dependants. There is also the question of posthumous claims. A deceased's representative who makes a claim receives markedly reduced payments. That is seen as unfairly arbitrary because, as I have said, once the disease takes hold, it can be quick in its effect and people can die within 12 to 18 months. Diagnosis is difficult and may occur only in a post mortem—it is hit or miss whether the disease is diagnosed before or after death. The difference in in-life and posthumous payments is too great to maintain that any differential payment is justified. Living and posthumous payments should be the same given the speed with which the disease kills once it takes effect, and there should be one table for payments rather than the existing system. It is a quarter of a century since the original Act was introduced. It was welcome, but do we need now to step back and examine our approach to it? The Government assume that the individual or their family, possibly with the help of a trade union—the GMB does a lot of work in this area—or excellent organisations such as TRUST, will pursue their claims for compensation through civil litigation, involving insurers and employers that still exist. The Government step in with compensation only when that does not happen. Several other countries operate differently. In France with the fund for victims of asbestos exposure and in the Netherlands with the institute for asbestos victims, a state-funded body makes quick initial payments to all people who are diagnosed as being affected. The state-funded body then seeks to claim back the money through insurers and existing employers. In those countries, and in Germany and Italy, the emphasis is different. The state takes the initial step and provides immediate payments, which are essential as people often die quickly once the disease takes hold, and then seeks to recover the money for the taxpayer's coffers through the civil system. We take a different approach in Britain, and the people who are involved at the grass roots in helping people affected by the disease believe that, a quarter of a century after a very good Act was introduced, it is time to reconsider how we apply that principle.

Draft Social Security (Intensive Activity Period 50 to 59 Pilot) and Draft Social Security (Intensive Activity Period 50 to 59 Pilot) (No.2) Regulations 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I echo the initial comments about serving under your chairmanship, Mr. Sayeed. I am sure you know that just before we started, a colleague of mine was so keen to join in that he tried to gatecrash the Committee. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the general principle behind providing the intensive activity period to the 50 to 59 year age group. The IAP will extend to that age group support and retraining of a much better quality. The evaluation studies by the Department for Work and Pensions highlighted the fact that job search support for workers in that age group can be very successful, but only for that very small number of people who are choose to access it and make use of it. That group tends to be better qualified, more recently in the job market, better motivated and, therefore, more successful. About 148,00 people in that age group claim jobseeker's allowance, compared with 1.41 million who are on sickness or disability benefit and another 120,000 who are on other benefits. About 1.5 million people are being missed by the current process, although a quarter of those in the age group who are economically inactive express a positive interest in returning to work if they can overcome the various barriers facing them. The extension of the pilots offers an interesting way better to support the harder-to-place group.

That will become ever more important as our population ages. In 1992, 21 per cent. of the work force was in the 50-plus working age category; in 2001, the figure was 24 per cent., and it will continue to rise for another decade or two. That group is more likely to suffer age-related sickness or disability—back problems, poor sight, and so on. We should put a lot of effort into helping them to remain in or to return to work, whether full or part-time. Many people in different age groups who are out of employment need more intensive support than simple job search facilities. Those in the 50-plus group may face particular issues because they have been unemployed in the longer term: they might have low self-esteem, and employers might automatically dismiss their applications on the ground that they have been out of work for some time. Many in my constituency were forced out of the mining industry in the 1980s and early 1990s, and although many have retrained and moved into one of a massive variety of jobs, a large number are still among the long-term unemployed. Another group of people, including some in the group I just described, perceive their skills to be outdated. Some of the internal research and evaluation done by the Department for Work and Pensions gives examples of people in the 50-plus group being sent on computer training courses. I can think of a dozen individuals in that category in Chesterfield who simply said, "At my age, I do not want to know about that type of work." The training offered to those wanting to re-enter the job market needs to be flexible and tailored to individual perceptions. It should not be a take-it-or-leave-it affair. Finally, a large proportion of the over-50s suffer from various kinds of sickness or disability, often age related. They need support to help them into appropriate work. More intensive support is needed to change employers' attitudes to older people—just as they need to be changed for disabled people. We may therefore need longer training and retraining courses than are usually offered under the new deal, which tend to be short and sharp and may not deliver the fundamental retraining and reskilling that is needed. I was going to ask two questions at the end of my speech, but you have already answered the first. I was going to ask why the pilots were split, and you said that the second wave, including the ones in Chesterfield and the one in Staveley, will come on stream in January 2005. You said that they were involved in a series of previous pilots linked with various aspects of the new deal. We hear about lots of pilots, but we rarely hear about the nationwide roll-out of successfully piloted schemes. I was going to ask at what point the pilots will be evaluated, and you said that you would expect it do be in the spring of 2008. In effect, you have already answered the first question.

The second question is about the monitoring of sanctions and their effect. You said that, through the pilots, you would monitor differences between the mandated group who are called in to take part in the scheme, and the non-mandated group who takes part only voluntarily. Within that, will you also monitor the effect of sanctions on those in the age group where sanctions apply? Some of the DWP's research shows that sanctions can have a negative effect in other categories—for example, those released from prison and those who are overcoming drug problems often have a fairly chaotic lifestyle. If sanctions are applied automatically in such situations, perhaps because people have not kept appointments, not kept up their training or not attended interviews, you—

The Chairman : Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I am not responsible for answering any questions. The Minister is. **Paul Holmes:** I am sorry, Mr. Sayeed.

Research done by the Minister's Department shows that many people in those categories to whom sanctions are applied end up going back to a life of crime, because the loss of benefits has taken them below their survival level. Sanctions can be counter-productive. We have expressed similar doubts about the Department applying sanctions to people with children and young families. What is the effect on the children of sanctions that are applied to the parents? The question of those who have just come out of prison or those who have young children is less likely to be relevant to the 50-plus age group, although it cannot be disregarded entirely. However,

Other factors relevant to that age group may make them reluctant to take part—and therefore prone to sanctions being applied. For example, only 25 per cent. of the economically inactive over-50s have expressed a positive willingness to get back to work, compared with 40 per cent. of disabled people generally in all age ranges. Why is that? It might be due to age—a feeling that they lack the skills for modern jobs—but other factors may be important. People in that age group may be caring for older, ill or less able partners; they may not feel able to take part in the programmes on offer or to return to work because of their caring responsibilities. Many over-50s still care for older parents—old age pensioners who need care in order to live at home. Some people in that age group care for children with learning disabilities at home. In its recently launched report on that growing problem, the John Groom charity said that 200,000 adapted homes will probably be needed for those who will no longer be able to live at home with their aged parents, either because their parents have died, or because they have moved into care themselves.

Those, then, are three reasons why people in the 50-plus age group might be less able and less willing to return to work and, therefore, more subject to sanctions. The Minister already has internal evaluations showing the negative effect of sanctions on people in other parts of the new deal, but how far will he monitor their effect on the 50-plus age group?

GOVERNMENT FAILS TO MAKE DRAFT DISABILITY BILL ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WITH LEARNING DISABILITY 2 March 2004

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability has tabled a Parliamentary Motion expressing concern that the Government is failing to make the draft Disability Discrimination Bill easily accessible to those the Bill is designed to empower.

The motion calls upon the Government to quickly rectify this failure to ensure it does not repeat the mistake of the NHS consultation Fair for All made available in accessible form two weeks before the deadline for comments.

Paul Holmes commented: *"If the fine words about disability rights are to mean anything in reality then action must follow the words. It was two months after the draft Bill was first published that an accessible version was produced. Now it seems actually getting one presents further obstacles, having struggled myself to find out how to apply. The Government's commitment to eradicating discrimination against people with disabilities can be measured by the taking of even the simplest and most obvious steps – ensuring that those affected by the draft legislation have a real opportunity to read and understand the proposals, and comment on them."*

Notes: Early day motion 713

That this House congratulates the Learning Disability Taskforce upon producing its Second Annual Report on the Valuing People White Paper, which was launched in Parliament on 26th February; notes with concern its finding that the Government has not produced a version of the draft Disability Discrimination Bill which is accessible to those with learning disabilities; and calls upon the Government to quickly rectify this and not to repeat the mistake of the NHS consultation Fair For All, Personal to You which only became available in accessible form for people with learning disabilities two weeks before the deadline for comments and so was not fair for all.

Versions of the bill that would meet the needs of many people with learning disabilities could come in a variety of forms. Most simply, drafts of the Disability Discrimination Bill need to be available in alternative formats, including large type, and on non-white paper, which can make it easier to read for many people. As well, on-line versions need to be available in formats compatible with assistive technology, which can read out loud any on-screen text. It is common practice to also make Braille, BSL and audio versions available on request.

PENSIONS BILL DEBATE 2ND MARCH 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I want to concentrate most of my comments on the issue of the need to restore confidence in the pensions system, which was referred to earlier, for example, by the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). In large part, this Bill is trying to restore that shattered confidence by plugging loopholes and rectifying mistakes that stem from the Pensions Act 1995, which in turn was trying to deal with the shattered confidence after the Maxwell scandal. The position for pensions is predicated on an insufficient state pension, which for some is topped up by the complex means-testing of the pension credit. For a growing number, however, the Government hope that it will be supplemented by private pensions. The Government make a virtue of the fact that the state pension is insufficient—the Chancellor recently eulogised about the fact that pensions will take about 5 per cent. of our gross national product in future compared with 15 per cent. in some western European countries. Having such a low state pension, however, means that people must save for private pensions. If they are to do so, they must have confidence in the system—confidence that a lifetime's savings and investment in a pension fund will not be wiped out at the drop of a hat. With the pension protection fund, the Bill proposes some measures to try to restore that confidence. Issues have been mentioned, which will be pored over in detail in Committee, such as the

relationship between a flat-rate levy and the introduction of a risk-related levy, and whether that will be underwritten by the Government. In the USA, a similar scheme has run well for nearly 30 years. It was introduced initially in the mid-1970s to restore confidence after a major company in the American economy—Studebaker, I believe—went bust. Recently, after nearly 30 years of successful running, it has hit a crisis due to the state of the stock market. As one hon. Member suggested, it may well have to be—or already has been, as one hon. Member suggested—underwritten by the Government. Inevitably, that issue will need to be considered for the UK system. If the pension protection fund, either in its first year or 30 years down the line, hits similar problems to the American one, why crisis-manage at that stage rather than plan for it in the Bill in Committee? The other area in which confidence must be restored is with regard to those who in good faith accepted the Government's urgings and promises over the years and saved for an occupational pension, but have found that they have lost most or all of that money. That was first brought home to me just a few weeks after I was elected in 2001, because United Engineering Forgings put its six companies across the country into administration. Chesterfield Cylinders, in my constituency, was one of those companies. It is now trading profitably and successfully under new ownership, with the same excellent work force and local management, but without its pension. As a result of meeting Chesterfield Cylinders pensioners in Chesterfield, and another company that shortly afterwards arrived at the same process—Dema Glass in Chesterfield—I first wrote on this issue to the Minister for Pensions on 26 November 2001. I have been raising the issue since then, both in oral questions and in debates in the Chamber. Incidentally, looking back over that letter, I note that one of the four points I asked him to consider was whether actuaries should be required to provide annual rather than triennial reviews and forecasts. I made that request specifically because workers at both Dema Glass and Chesterfield Cylinders had been persuaded by their employers to keep paying into the pension fund when the firm was beginning to hit problems. Moreover, in the case of Chesterfield Cylinders they had been asked to increase their contributions. Had they had the benefit of annual projections from the actuary they might well have chosen not to go down that route, because in a fairly short time those companies went bust and they lost most of their pension. I am interested to see in the Bill a suggestion that actuaries will be required to report annually rather than triennially.

Following Dema Glass and Chesterfield Cylinders, the issues continued to develop around the country. Most recently, late last year Coalite, a very large company just outside Chesterfield employing many people in my constituency, went the same way. The workers in those three companies form just part of the estimated 60,000 pensioners across the country who have lost all or most of their pensions in that way. About 90 per cent. of the companies affected, including those in my constituency, have been in manufacturing—in the ex-coal industry, the steel industry and the glass manufacturing industry—but that is a side issue, a debate for another time. My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) rightly said that we should not become too lost in the statistics, however we look at them. Whether 60,000 people have lost their pensions or whether the £100 million a year it might cost to compensate them is a huge sum that the Government cannot possibly meet or, as the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) described it, is small change, should not dominate too much. We should remember the individuals involved and their anger. The hon. Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) gave eloquent examples of constituents who have gone through the process. I should like to add examples from my constituents, real individuals from Chesterfield, who illustrate the points that have already been made about broken promises and the need to restore confidence in the system. The first, whom I met in 2001, was a Labour councillor in Chesterfield—this is a cross-party issue, not a partisan issue. He still works for Chesterfield Cylinders. He told me that he had worked in the steel industry for his entire working life. When he began work membership of the works pension scheme was compulsory, as we have heard from a number of hon. Members relating to firms in their constituencies. Over the years, Governments of various political complexions promised that such schemes were safe, especially after the Pensions Act 1995 and the Maxwell scandal. However, my constituent found in 2001 that he had lost between 60 per cent. and 80 per cent. of the money he had saved for 40 years. Approaching the end of his working life, he was too old and it was too late even to contemplate starting to save any worthwhile sum to replace the money of which he rightly felt he had been legally robbed. He had done all the right things, he had made all the provision that had been asked of him, and he feels bitter and angry that he has lost his private pension. Later that year I visited a constituent on her

60th birthday. When her children were very young she had become a single parent, but she had not sat back and said, "The state will look after me and my children." She had done all the things that various Governments over the years had urged her to do. She had gone out to full-time work, for Dema Glass, and successfully raised two teenage daughters single-handedly. She had saved and managed to pay off her mortgage. In the last 10 years of her working life she had even saved towards an occupational pension, only to receive two days before her 60th birthday a letter explaining that all or most of her pension had disappeared and she would not receive the money for which she had worked so hard. Those are two examples of people who lost their money. I have an interesting third example: the daughter of the lady I have just mentioned. She was aged 26 at the time in question. She works for a well-known large national and international retail company, which is nearly 100 years old. It seems an absolutely rock solid, safe bet. She was about to start paying into the works pension scheme, but then she witnessed what had happened to her mother and heard what had happened at Chesterfield Cylinders. She asked me, "Why bother? What is the point at my age, in my twenties starting to save for a lifetime for a private pension, even with a firm that seems absolutely rock solid?" As I have said, 30 years earlier, when her mother started working for her pension, Dema Glass had seemed rock solid too. It was one of the major employers in Chesterfield—a really safe company that dominated the market. "Who knows?" she said. "Twenty or 30 years down the line, this might happen to me." We must provide justice for those who have lost their pensions in that way, and we must restore confidence to the younger generation. Were these people acting in good faith when they felt that they had been promised—guaranteed—that their pensions would be safe? The pensions action groups, which have received many tributes, have proved very good at unearthing documents to illustrate the way in which people feel they were misled. One action group member sent some quotations. The modern version of the document produced for trustees of pension schemes by the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority states on page 39: "The purpose of the minimum funding requirement is to try and make sure there are enough funds in the scheme at any one time" to meet various obligations, which it lists. It continues: "However", it is not designed to guarantee that the trustees could secure or buy out all benefits . . . if the scheme discontinued." Let us go back a few years, though, to the version published after the 1995 Act. The introduction says: "OPRA has been entrusted by Parliament with enforcing some very detailed provision introduced by the Pensions Act 1995 and associated regulations. These provisions are designed to help members have justified confidence in their scheme." Page 28 says: "The minimum funding requirement refers to the minimum amount of funds that should be in the scheme at any one time, in order to meet the scheme's liabilities if it were to be discontinued." Trustees felt that the old version provided a pretty firm assurance that the money was there, and that the 1995 Act would ensure that it was protected. The modern document rather hedges its bets. Other documents and speeches make interesting comparisons. Someone from the Dexion group, for instance, sent a quotation from a company document which stated: "All benefits which have been earned in the Dexion Group Pension and Insurance Scheme are protected by the law and by the Trust Deed and Rules." Speaking here on 3 November 1993, as Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) said: "We aim to create a framework for occupations pensions that is secure, stable and fair, and to encourage people to make provision for their retirement . . . It is a remarkable thing that individuals in this country, through their pension schemes, have such an immense ownership of wealth. It is good for them and the economy, and we want to make sure that that wealth is not only safe but is recognised as part of the rights that people have as a result of their savings during their working lives . . . we must not trade off security to achieve lower burdens on business."—[Official Report, 3 November 1993; Vol. 231, c358] On 13 March 1995, Lord Mackay of Ardbrecknish said that the minimum funding requirement "will mean that members can be confident that the value of their accrued rights is secure, especially in the event of the scheme or the employer company winding up."

That would apply to Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass, Coalite, ASW or any of the other examples of which we have heard. Lord Mackay continued:

"It is only right that the members' investment, and their accrued pension rights, should be properly protected. Our proposals are designed to provide that protection."—[Official Report, House of Lords, 13 March 1995; Vol. 562, c. 684.]

We have statements from Ministers in both Houses at the time of the 1995 Act saying "This will protect and guarantee your funds." We have documents from the Dexion group and from OPRA that

seem to imply to people that by saving with such schemes they will be guaranteed safety, and that the financial sacrifice they are making to invest in their future will not be wasted.

In conclusion, I repeat that the Bill needs to do two things. First, it must provide justice for the estimated 60,000 people who have lost out in the past few years. Those people believed that they had a guaranteed and protected pension, for which many of them had saved for 30 or 40 years. Secondly, the Bill must restore the confidence of the younger generation. To ensure a good retirement with an inadequate state pension, young people must save and invest more than any previous generation, but they are telling politicians and parents that the problems of recent years mean that they see no point in doing so.

CHESTERFIELD IGNORED DESPITE BUDGET PLEDGE ON JOBS FOR THE REGIONS 20th April 2004

Gordon Brown's budget pledge to save tax payers money by relocating plum Government jobs across the regions, has run into the sands at the first opportunity, ignoring places such as Chesterfield says **Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Work and Pensions Minister.**

At this afternoon's meeting of the Standing Committee dealing with the Pensions Bill, Chris Pond (Parliamentary Under Secretary for Work and Pensions) announced that the new Pensions Regulator would, with all his staff, be based in Brighton. Commenting after the Committee Paul Holmes said: *"This is not what Gordon Brown or the Lyons Report recommended. Once again Government spin has not been met in reality. Placing such an important new office as that of Pensions Protection Fund Regulator in the North or the Midlands would have shown that the Government meant business. Instead we have the usual empty words and vague promises for the future. This would have been a win win situation for everyone. Office rents would be cheaper saving taxpayers money, while staff relocating from Brighton would find house prices and living costs much less than in the overheated economy in the South of England. The Regional economy in the chosen area would benefit too, from the high quality jobs. I can even provide the Department of Work and Pensions with an ideal location in my constituency of Chesterfield. Perfect communications links with the Midland Mainline Railway and the M1 motorway on the doorstep. Lower office rental costs and excellently priced housing with the Peak District National Park 15 minutes away in one direction and a big city like Sheffield 15 minutes away in the other."*

Pensions Bill MUST GIVE JUSTICE FOR LOST MONEY AND RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN PENSION SYSTEM 3rd March 2004

Speaking in Yesterday's Pensions Bill Second Reading debate **Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield**, called on the Government to ensure that the Bill provides justice to the estimated 60,000 people who have lost some or all of their pension as their companies have collapsed, and to restore confidence in the system for the younger generation saving for their retirement.

Paul also raised the cases of Chesterfield constituents employed by Dema Glass, Chesterfield Cylinders and Coalite Ltd, companies who appeared rock solid yet whose employees have lost some or all of their pension. Paul stated: *"We must provide justice for those who have lost their pensions in that way, and we must restore confidence to the younger generation. Were these people acting in good faith when they felt that they had been promised—guaranteed—that their pensions would be safe? The pensions action groups, which have received many tributes, have proved very good at unearthing documents to illustrate the way in which people feel they were misled. Firstly [the Bill] must provide justice for the estimated 60,000 people who have lost out in the past few years. Those people believed that they had a guaranteed and protected pension, for which many of them had saved for 30 or 40 years. Secondly, the Bill must restore the confidence of the younger generation. To ensure a good retirement with an inadequate state pension, young people must save and invest more than any previous generation, but they are telling politicians and parents that the problems of recent years mean that they see no point in doing."*

Commenting after the debate Paul said: *"People who have worked and saved hard, listened to Government and official advice, and did what was expected of them should get justice. That should be our priority. "We will not be satisfied until the Bill provides for the people who have suffered the greatest injustice of all in that respect."*

COCA-COLA MUST ALLOW FAIR COMPETITION FOR BUXTON MINERAL WATER 10th March 2004

Paul Holmes MP, MP for Chesterfield has joined forces with Buxton Labour MP Tom Levitt today to sponsor a parliamentary motion calling on the Office of Fair Trading to investigate Coca-Cola's plans to ban Buxton Mineral Water from being stocked in chiller cabinets Coca-Cola provide to retailers.

The motion also points out the Buxton Mineral Water Company is a major employer in Derbyshire and calls on Coca-Cola to allow retailers some freedom as to whether they stock Buxton Mineral Water as is the case with ice-cream freezers, where the companies who own the freezer must allow a certain percentage of the volume of it to be filled at the retailers' discretion

Paul commented:

“As a Derbyshire MP who worked as a teacher for 17 years in Buxton I was more than happy to join Tom in his cross party campaign to protect this famous Derbyshire industry from unfair competition. It is especially unfair competition by Coca-Cola as their alternative is just re-bottled tap water and not genuine mineral water such as that produced in Buxton. Coca-Cola should allow retailers some freedom to stock alternative products in its chiller cabinets and the Office of Fair Trading should intervene to allow this.”

Notes

EDM: That this House: notes that Buxton mineral water has had a reputation for its pure and wholesome qualities for around 2000 years; that it has a significant place in the retail bottled water market and is the official drink for the Wimbledon tennis championship; that the Buxton Mineral Water company is a significant employer in Buxton; that the Coca Cola company, which provides chiller cabinets for drinks in many retail stores, is seeking to ban Buxton Mineral Water from its chiller cabinets and replace it with its own product; that whereas regulations exist to prevent the monopoly abuse of retail freezer cabinets for ice cream, no such regulations exist for chilled drinks; calls upon Coca Cola to behave as though such regulations did apply to chilled drinks and to continue to allow retailers some discretion as to whether or not to stock Buxton Mineral Water in their chiller cabinets; and requests the Office of Fair Trading to investigate this matter.

GOVERNMENT TURNING BLIND EYE TO MANUFACTURING COLLAPSE IN EAST MIDLANDS 17th March 2004

The Government is turning a blind eye to the collapse of manufacturing in the East Midlands, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said today.

Today's figures from the Office of National Statistics show that in the year 15,000 jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry in the East Midlands, with 88,000 lost nationally in the last year.

Paul Holmes MP, said:

“The Government is turning a blind eye to the collapse of the manufacturing industry. The Government's indifference to the thousands of jobs going to the wall is shocking. 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.”

Notes Today's figures from Labour Market Statistics March 2004 (ONS) show

15,000 manufacturing jobs lost between Sep 2002-Sep 2003 in the East Midlands (latest figures).

88,000 manufacturing jobs lost across the UK in the last year.

LOCAL MP SUPPORTS NEW GM LAW 29^h April 2004

Friends of the Earth today congratulated Paul Holmes MP for his continued support of the Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Bill. Paul wrote to the Secretary of State asking her to ensure the Government does not block the Bill when it returns to Parliament on 14th May.

The GMO Bill requires contamination and liability rules to be in place before further planting of GM crops, and requires these rules to be voted on by the House of Commons and developed assemblies. Without such rules, non-GM and organic farms could be contaminated by GM crops, and farmers who found their crops

were contaminated by GM traits would stand little chance of winning compensation from the GM industry who cause the pollution.

The Bill returns to the House of Commons on 14th May. Although there is likely to be little time for a debate, but the House of Commons can still support the Bill in principle as long as no MP shouts 'object' when the Bill is raised.

Paul Holmes MP said:

"The Government must recognise and accept the widespread public concerns on this issue. Even if the Bill is sabotaged by procedural tricks on 14th May, the Government could still choose to implement its proposed safeguards."

Martyn Williams, Senior Parliamentary Campaigner said:

"We are grateful to Paul Holmes' continued support for new laws to control GM crops in the UK. The GMO Bill is common sense approach to new technology which carries very real risks, and should be governed by rules that are carefully scrutinised and studied by MPs. The Government must back the Bill when it next comes before Parliament."

GOVERNMENT DESERVE FIVE OUT OF TEN FOR EFFORT 10 June 2004

Speaking in the Disability debate on 10th June, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Disability said:

"The Government deserves support for many of the steps it has taken on disability issues, such as establishing the Disability Rights Commission and producing the Draft Disability Bill. However there are still many flaws and gaps in their progress so far. "The Disability Bill was promised in 2001, has only just been introduced in draft in 2004 and many not be passed because of the next General Election. "Government rhetoric on equal rights and social inclusion are undermined when their own policy on testing and League Tables lead to the exclusion of children with Special Educational Needs from schools at the 'top of the league' "The superficial target driven culture of the New Deal works against the interest of people with disabilities who need quality support to get into work not compulsory interviews and benefit sanctions."

Speaking after the debate Paul commented: "As a former teacher I can only give the Government five out of ten for the efforts so far. A great deal remains to be done."

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): As others have said, this is an important debate on an important subject. The criteria introduced by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 are used by 9.8 million disabled people, and one family in four has a member with a disability. Moreover, in an ageing population, disability visits more and more of us: it is not just something that happens to other people.

I do not say this often, but I agree with the opening remarks of the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman). It is a shame that the debate is taking place on the day of the largest electoral event since the last general election and before the next. Inevitably, many Members, including some who are assiduous in campaigning and attending debates on disability issues, cannot therefore be here today. I remember speaking in a debate on valuing people, which also took place at the end of the week, to an almost empty Chamber. It is unfortunate that such important debates are sometimes sidelined.

The attitude to disability has changed considerably in the past 30, 40 or 50 years. It used to be thought that disabled people should stay at home, out of sight out of mind, or—even worse—that they should be confined to institutions where they could not get in other people's way. The attitude has changed for the better because of the improving legal framework. All credit for that should go to this Government in particular. The framework has improved as a result of education and training, cash investment and the adoption of more open social attitudes in general. I am very glad that I was born and grew up in the second half of the 20th century, and that my children were born, grew up and will live as citizens in the 21st century.

The myriad disability groups deserve huge praise for the advances of the last 30 or 40 years. Before I became the Liberal Democrat spokesman on disability in 2001, I thought I knew quite a lot about disability. For some years, as a teacher in a very good comprehensive school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt), I taught a range of disabled children in a mainstream 11-to-18 setting. I taught children with Down's syndrome, fragile X syndrome, hearing and sight impairment, cerebral palsy and spina bifida.

Having been a political campaigner and a in Chesterfield for many years and having lived in the town for a quarter of a century, I have encountered many examples of disability arising from industrial histories and legacies—in particular, those of a coalfield

community. Much of my case load, since I have been an MP and when I was a councillor, has related to people suffering from vibration white finger, pneumoconiosis, asbestosis and numerous other industrial diseases. I have worked with quite a few disability groups in Chesterfield that deal with such conditions. For some years my mother-in-law, who lives two streets away from me in Chesterfield, has been a regular user of the excellent services provided by another voluntary group, Shopmobility, which enable her to visit the town centre.

I thought, therefore, that I was fairly knowledgeable about such groups, but since 2001 I have discovered a vast array of others—far more than I knew existed. They provide two superb services. They give support, care and help to specific groups of disabled people; but more important in the long run, I think, are their expert campaigning and lobbying of Ministers, Members of both Houses and the press on the changes that are needed in society to improve the overall lot of people with disabilities, and social and legal provision for them. They certainly deserve a great deal of credit, and I shall mention a number of them in due course.

The Government also deserve credit. I do not want to intrude on the private historical squabbling—we have heard quite a bit of that today—between the Labour and Conservative parties about the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which has been covered in some detail. To be charitable, the DDA was an important step forward, as were the subsequent extensions of it. The establishment of the Disability Rights Commission was very important, and the draft Disability Discrimination Bill—when it eventually becomes law—will be a significant step in filling the gaps in the DDA. The recognition of British sign language, the "Valuing People: Moving Forward Together" report and its initial implementation, the mental capacity Bill and even this week's announcement on the framework for partnership action by the Secretary of State for Health and the DRC are examples of major improvements for which the Government should be praised.

I very much support what the Government are doing in this regard, but we would not be doing our job today if we simply indulged in mutual praise and back-slapping—not that the previous speakers have done so—and talked about the good progress that is being made. In the light of previous debates, I am sure that the Minister would be very disappointed if I did not say that although much has been achieved, a great deal more remains to be done.

As I have said, attitudes and awareness have improved enormously compared with just 20 years ago, and certainly compared with 30 or 40 years ago.

However, there are still huge black holes in terms of training and of the approach of various people. Reference was made earlier to small and medium-sized enterprises' lack of awareness of what will be required of them this autumn, when the next extension of the DDA takes place. There was some argument about whether the Government should be blamed for not publicising these imminent changes sufficiently. According to a UnumProvident survey, 90,000 SMEs—69 per cent. of the total—are more or less totally unaware of what will be expected of them in a relatively few weeks' time. As some Members have pointed out, there has been a great deal of publicity in the past year or so, but perhaps it should have begun considerably earlier. Many of the changes that small businesses will have to make to meet the DDA's requirements would be quite simple to incorporate if made over a number of years. I am thinking, for example, of the routine refitting of a shop or office, which happens every so often anyway. Had the changes not appeared to be last-minute changes, they would not seem such an obstacle to small businesses once they finally do learn what is expected of them; most still do not really know what is expected of them.

Tom Levitt: Is it not true that regardless of such legislation being due to take effect in October, some £50 billion of disabled people's spending power is not being tapped into? It would be very wise for shops and other small businesses to take such measures anyway; indeed, they should have taken them a long time ago in their own interests.

Paul Holmes: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that point applies to what I shall say later about what the Government need to do in certain areas. It is not "just" a question of the equal rights of disabled people; it is also a question of the self-interest of many shopkeepers, restaurant owners and other businesses. If they are not accessible, friendly and welcoming to disabled people, they are excluding themselves from a huge potential income. I imagine that Ryanair, for example, will not get too much custom from disabled people, following the recent case that showed it in quite a bad light.

There are lots of other examples that show that awareness and education are still lacking. A recent DRC report on website access showed that the vast majority of business and service industry websites are not accessible. There are historical problems in the railway industry, such as those associated with London's Victorian underground system. The industry has argued that making its rolling stock accessible to disabled people by 2035 is acceptable, but the Government have said that doing so by 2025 would be better. However, Leonard Cheshire, which is campaigning hard on this issue, has said that 2017 would be far a more reasonable date. Of course, even that is 13 years away.

We have heard about the progress that has been made with the introduction of accessible buses, but simply introducing them is not the end of the story. A constituent of mine—from his wheelchair, he is a very active campaigner—has contacted me several times about the problems that he has encountered. Stagecoach, which provides most of the local services, is rightly very proud of the "kneeling" buses that they have introduced on a number of routes. However, the buses often will not kneel to let my constituent on. On one occasion, the excuse was given that because the bus was running late, the driver had to make up time and did not want to spend time operating the hydraulics to let on someone in a wheelchair. On another occasion, the excuse offered was that the driver in question had not been trained in how to use a kneeling bus. On a further occasion, the excuse was that the optics were grimy and

would not operate the equipment. On three separate occasions, this one constituent was unable to access these wonderful kneeling buses, for reasons connected with training, operational practice and awareness among staff of the company.

I recently spoke at the Royal College of Nursing conference at Harrogate and talked to a group of nurses who worked on improving the access of the learning disabled to the health service. One of the nurses from Scotland provided an example of what happened two or three years ago in the NHS in Scotland. His brother-in-law, who had learning disabilities, was rushed into hospital. The nurse drove some miles to get to the hospital, and when he went in he saw his brother-in-law sat there white faced, with clenched teeth, sweating and obviously in pain, but unable to express what was wrong with him on account of his learning disabilities. The brother-in-law took the nurse to one side and told her that he was really in pain. Apparently, the nurse patted him on the shoulder and said, "Don't worry, they do not feel pain like we do." That took place in the health service only two or three years ago.

I also spoke recently at a care conference in Leicester, where one of the delegates talked about his experience within the last year of working in a residential care home in the south-west. He got into trouble because, while he was working there, he took people with learning disabilities and people in wheelchairs down to the local pub in the evening for a couple of pints. That was viewed as unacceptable. We can congratulate ourselves on how much progress has been made, but there is an awful lot more to be done in respect of people's attitude and awareness.

To conclude that subject, I should like to make a few comments about Ofcom. In respect of how access to telecommunications should be interpreted, Ofcom started out by saying that it would not insist on television companies subtitling live programmes because it could not technically be done. The Royal National Institute for Deaf People took me and other Members from here and the other place to visit a company in London that subtitles programmes. There we saw people sat at their computer screens subtitling live sports and news programmes and live debates with no problem at all. It is perfectly possible to do so, yet Ofcom had said that it was not prepared to press that requirement because it could not be done. Subsequently, Ofcom admitted that it could be done and that it had been wrong.

In that light, I would like the Minister to tell us whether she is aware of the basic technical errors that Ofcom made in its consultation on access to telecom services. Does she share the view of Lord McIntosh, who expressed his hope in the other place that Ofcom would accept the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Older and Disabled People? Does she accept that access to television is a basic right and that the growing choice of channels and programmes offered by digital television should be equally available to all? Answers will be needed quickly, because Ofcom will soon report its requirements for the telecommunications industry on subtitling, access and so on. Then there is the question of Government delay. I have already said that I support and praise the vast majority of what they have done, but in certain respects they are delaying and not moving fast enough. We have already mentioned the draft Disability Discrimination Bill. It was promised in the 2001 manifesto and disability groups were very disappointed that it did not appear in the Queen's Speech that year, or the subsequent year. It finally appeared in the Queen's Speech in 2003. Responses from the draft scrutiny are now being considered. Will it be timetabled to get through Parliament before the next general election destroys it? Had the Government given more priority to this issue and introduced the draft Bill last year or the year before, as they promised in the manifesto, the Bill would already be on the statute book. Clearly, the Government could have moved faster in some areas. In his closing comments, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) referred to the need for a single equality Bill and asked the Government to look into how it could be drafted. The experiment has already been done. In the other place, Lord Lester, a leading civil rights lawyer, and others, produced a draft single equality Bill in order to clarify the complex mess of equality legislation across six different strands. At the moment, disabled people do not have the same equality rights as people in other discriminatory strands. That was taken through the other place and 247 Members of this House supported an early-day motion stating that a similar measure should be introduced here—but the Government ignored it completely. A draft Bill has been produced, debated and thoroughly gone through. About 40 per cent. of hon. Members supported it straight away, but there has been no sign of any action from the Government. Sarah Spencer, the chair of the equality and diversity forum, told the inaugural meeting of the all-party group on equalities on 20 April that there was a clear and urgent need for such a Bill. I turn now to the possible establishment of a single commission. The DRC was originally critical of the proposal, although it has accepted some of the Government's reassurances. However, despite the Government's concessions, it remains concerned that a single commission could mean that disabled people will have no organisation to speak for them. It has said that, without a single equality Act, it will be difficult for disabled people to argue for the equal rights that they lack in the law as it stands. A recent Age Concern campaign estimated that about 2 million people do not claim attendance allowance, even though they are entitled to it and need it. In answer to parliamentary questions, most recently last autumn, the Government said that the size of the problem was not known, and that it would be too difficult and expensive to determine it. They said that they would not mount a mass publicity campaign to encourage people to take up the allowance because it was better to work through local authorities and welfare rights organisations.

Maria Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is not at all obvious who is eligible for extra-cost benefits such as attendance allowance, for which certain criteria must be met? The only way to find out is if people claim. It is much more difficult to estimate what take-up of attendance allowance ought to be than is the case with other benefits. **Paul Holmes:** I accept that it can be difficult to produce reliable estimates of take-up. Attempts were made in 1996–97, but such estimates can be open to all sorts of interpretations. The Government have said that they do not want to mount a mass awareness campaign but prefer to go through

specialist groups. I spent a day with a Chesterfield borough council staff member whose job is to respond to information from bodies such as neighbourhood watch that an elderly person needs a door chain or window locks, for example. He is trained to ask that elderly person whether he or she has claimed pension credit, attendance allowance or some other benefit. He secures benefits worth hundreds of pounds in allowances for those elderly people, or even gets central heating installed for them. That is all well and good, yet cash resources are needed to pay the staff required even though local authorities are told that they must keep council tax down. I hope that the Government will make available resources to make that option work.

A campaign to secure a winter fuel allowance for disabled people was running for a long time before I entered Parliament. The Government refuse even to consider making that allowance available for disabled people, saying that people who are not of retirement age do not need it. However, I received an e-mail this week from a person aged 41 who is suffering from cancer and is confined to the house. That person suffered enormously from the cold as a result, a fact that many disability groups have been aware of for a long time. I cannot understand why the winter fuel allowance is not extended to people with medium and higher levels of disability. The Government deserve praise for recognising British Sign Language, but what happens next? Finland's population is one-tenth the size of ours, but the country has 600 sign language interpreters. The UK has 400. There are not enough such interpreters available to profit from the recognition of BSL. With the roll-out of the new disability discrimination legislation, employers should make available access to such interpreters, when that is appropriate or necessary. What do the Government plan to do to ensure that more interpreters are trained and made available? They displayed good intentions when they recognised BSL, but they must put those good intentions into practice over the next two or three years.

In business questions earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) said that he had heard that the Government are to host an EU conference on how to support and introduce the use of sign language. Will the Minister give the House some details about that to clarify what is happening? There are contradictions in Government policy. A Department may make a statement on a matter that is undermined by another Department. I used to be a teacher, and one example that comes to mind has to do with education. The Department for Education and Skills has said, on the one hand, that it is in favour of social inclusion, and that disabled children should have access to mainstream schools, and all types of school; but on the other hand there is the policy of testing. Our children are the most tested in the western world, from when they enter infant school to when they leave secondary school. League tables reflect their results, and schools live or die by the tables when it comes to the children they attract, the money they get and the performance-related pay of teachers, which depends on how successful teachers are in getting children through exams. I know all about that because in the first year of performance-related pay I filled in my own application to cross the professional threshold, and one of the main criteria is how the teacher's classes are doing in terms of academic performance. All the statistics, including the Government figures every February and annual Ofsted reports, show that the schools that do best in the league tables of which the Government are so fond as they try to drive up standards are generally those schools with the lowest number of children with special educational needs. I could provide many anecdotal examples of schools in Derbyshire that are high in the league table but where the head will tell people their child would be better off at the school up the road because it is better suited to their needs.

On the one hand, then, the Government say they want social inclusion; on the other, they follow educational policies that work absolutely against it. The Select Committee on Education and Skills, on which I serve, is nearing the end of its scrutiny of the draft School Transport Bill. Almost every witness before the Committee has said that most of it is pointless. Almost all the experiments in it to get children to walk to school or use buses and so on are already being done by various local authorities around the country, so there is no need for a Bill to set them out. The only thing that the Bill does that cannot be done now is that it would let local authorities ignore the ruling in the Education Act 1944 about free school transport, which is that children attending junior schools more than two miles from their home and children going to secondary schools more than three miles from home can get free transport. The largest part of local education authorities' transport budgets is that for SEN children. I visited an excellent deaf unit at New Whittington primary school in my constituency three or four weeks ago, and one of the children comes from 15 to 20 miles away from somewhere in Derbyshire and gets in a taxi each morning to be taken there. A lot of people who have children with SEN who have to travel some distance to an appropriate setting are afraid that they will be charged under the experiments contained in the draft Bill. Again, on the one hand the Government have excellent policies on SEN children's inclusion in schools and the provision of specialist units like the deaf unit in Chesterfield, while on the other the Government are considering an experiment that people fear will lead to children and parents being charged for access to the special provision that they need.

Then there is overall Government policy and its intentions. I am thinking of the new deal for the disabled and associated programmes. One problem of the new deal, often aired in the Chamber, is its emphasis on the quick fix, partly so that targets are hit as people are got into work and off long-term unemployment by recycling them through the new deal, but partly because of the philosophy, which has some degree of truth to it, that the longer someone is unemployed, the less likely they are to get back to work. In terms of people with disabilities, many of whom have never worked but want to get into work, and many of whom have not worked for many years, none of that is as applicable. Is it best to deal with such people by calling them for compulsory interviews with the threat of sanctions if they do not do as they are told? Or will that frighten people with learning disabilities? I attended a recent meeting in Chesterfield involving Phoenix, a good not-for-profit company that delivers part of the Government's

programme in this area, and community psychiatric nurses who were there to learn about the condition management programme being piloted in Derbyshire. The nurses were worried that the people they work with would receive demands out of the blue, telling them that they had to attend interviews and would lose their benefits if they did not. Is that really the best way to deal with people with mental health problems and learning disabilities?

There are many good examples of how those people should be dealt with, but they are being handicapped, to some degree, by the strictures of the new deal approach. For example, the empower project being run by Chesterfield chamber of commerce works with disabled people, though not exclusively, and has found that even to get some people to a level at which they could think about applying for a job might take some weeks or months of basic life skills training before they could consider being placed in a job or a workplace. It is difficult but not impossible to match up such projects to the demands of the new deal. Phoenix, a not-for-profit company, has done innovative work in this area in order to deliver some Government programmes. The Government must respect the Shaw Trust because it is now the largest job broker for disabled people for the Government across the United Kingdom. In the next year it will work with 30,000 of the 1 million disabled adults who say that they would love to get back to work if they could be helped to overcome the obstacles in their way.

All those bodies and Unum, a private insurance company that works in this area, say that whatever the disability, more resources, more quality input and more time is needed to achieve a positive outcome than the new deal, in its initial stages, allows. The Government need to rethink their approach there.

Let me give one specific example. Recently I was talking to some advisers at the Chesterfield Jobcentre Plus who find that the return-to-work benefit is useful in some cases. They cited the example of a lady who had had a pressurised job as a personnel manager and had a nervous breakdown, but who wanted to get back to work. She could return partially without worrying too much about the loss of money because for one year she got the return-to-work benefit. At the end of the year she would probably regain enough confidence to return full-time—she had gained some confidence in two or three months—and would not need further benefits. That would be a win-win situation for everyone; no problem.

Many disabled people would not be in that category. Some will never be able to work full-time. Some will have disabilities that come and go, such as multiple sclerosis and ME, and may be able to work all this week but not next week. They express the fear that having struggled hard to gain access to disability benefits, if they return to work they will lose the benefits and face the problem of getting back on them. Would it not be a good idea to introduce a partial disability benefit, whereby some disabled people can sign up to work, say, 20 hours a week, but will get the relevant percentage of benefit for the rest of the week because they will never be able to work full-time? That would offer such reassurance to people in those categories that it would be worth the risk, as they see it at the moment, of trying to get back into work.

Finally, there is the question of financial resources. There are resource issues in everything that we have talked about this afternoon. There are many examples and there is much research evidence from the various disability groups to back this up. The John Grooms report said that 300,000 wheelchair-accessible homes are needed now. Who is building them? Where is the money? What is happening? The Joseph Rowntree report recently said that care homes are short of £1 billion. The Shaw Trust points out that if we spend five times more on employment programmes for disabled people, we will reach the European average for the first time. That is a 500 per cent. increase.

The National Autistic Society says that 90 per cent. of short-break schemes for carers have waiting lists. Carers cannot get the breaks they need. Yet, if they reach breaking point, as outlined in the earlier Mencap report on the same theme last June, the state, taxpayers and everyone lose out. If the disabled person who is being cared for has to go into residential care, it is far more expensive and far less satisfactory for everyone. Last year's Mencap report pointed out that six out of the 10 families that the authors talked to had never had a carer's assessment, let alone got on a waiting list for a weekend break or a weekday break for carers.

This May, the Down's Syndrome Association pointed out that the Government's stated policy for more inclusion in education is failing in practice because of local education authority reluctance to provide sufficient resources. That brings us to arguments about whether the Government are giving LEAs enough money but they are spending it elsewhere, or whether the Government are not giving them enough in the first place. Those arguments were raised last year in the education funding debate, for example.

Money can be spent more efficiently. A couple of years ago I went to Leicester and looked at the organisation run by the Red Cross there. On behalf of Leicester city, Leicester county council and Rutland council, it operates the distribution, collection, cleaning and redistribution of the whole range of mobility aids. Because it operates on that scale, with computerised inventories and so on, it has saved a lot of money. It gets the equipment back because it knows where the equipment has gone. Often hospitals and social services do not know that. Because of the scale on which it works, it can also return equipment to a state in which it is fit to issue to someone else, rather than having to buy brand new equipment and losing it to somebody's outhouse. Money can be handled in better ways and some efficiency savings can be made, but I am dubious about the idea that all the funding can be provided from such savings. As the population ages, we will have more disability. The older people are, the more they suffer from disabilities of various kinds. The more that we talk, legislate and create a framework of equal rights for disabled people, the more money will be required to make the rhetoric a reality. I hope that the Minister will accept my more critical comments in the helpful spirit in which I intend them. I support much of what the Government have done in the past few years, but much more remains to be done.

COMMITTEE HORROR AT CAPITA CONTRACT AWARD 16th June 2004

Members of the Education and Skills Select Committee reacted with horror today at the news that CAPITA had been awarded the contract to administer the nationwide delivery of the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

David Normington (Permanent Secretary at the DfES) was reminded of the previously damning Select Committee Report on the Individual Learning Account fiasco which had castigated CAPITA for the weaknesses in its software and call centre, when delivering what was a badly designed scheme wide open to fraud. Commenting later Liberal Democrat Committee member Paul Holmes said

"It was only yesterday in a Parliamentary debate on the failures of the Child Support Agency that I raised with the Minister the appalling Government track record on outsourcing IT functions. In that instance I was questioning the appalling record of EDS in failing to provide an efficient and working system despite delivering the system two years late and being paid £450 million of taxpayers money to do so. I made the specific comparison to CAPITA's similar failure as highlighted in the Education and Skills Select Committee Report on ILA's.

"It seems that there are so few companies in this market that the Government just keep going back to them whatever blunders they make."

READ SMALL PRINT WARNS PAUL HOLMES OVER BLAIR PENSION PROMISE

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield (Liberal Democrat Shadow Work and Pensions Minister) writes:

"Local works pension holders such as those from Coalite, Chesterfield Cylinders and Dema Glass will at first sight be overjoyed at today's (14th May 2004) news.

The Government have at last given in to the pressure to compensate the 60,000 workers, across the country, who were legally robbed of pensions which the Government had previously reassured them were safeguarded by the 1995 Pensions Act. But as with all such Government promises the small print needs careful study. The £400 Million over 20 years which has been announced is just £20 Million per year compared to the £55 - £75 million which pensions experts calculate will be needed. That means that most of the workers affected would not get the majority of the money they are owed.

The details of today's promise will be pored over carefully during next weeks three day debate on the Pensions Bill in the House of Commons. As the Bill recently went through its detailed Committee stage I argued the case, in Committee, for full compensation as I have been doing for the last three years. I will be keeping up the pressure next week. The Government was facing defeat in next Wednesday's crucial vote. This partial concession may buy off enough rebel Labour MP's to save them. That could leave the majority of affected workers without full recovery of their lost pension money."

GOVERNMENT RAISING FALSE HOPES ON PENSION COMPENSATION- HOLMES 20th May 2004

Despite Ministers repeatedly stating that they did not want to raise false hopes for a compensation package for 60,000 workers who have lost their pensions, the proposals passed in Parliament yesterday on the issue have achieved the exact opposite according to local MP, Paul Holmes.

The £400 million pension compensation package offered by the Government is £2 billion short of being able to offer compensation to all those who lost their occupational pensions. This would mean at most 30% of the 60,000 who have lost out (including workers at Dema Glass, Chesterfield Cylinders and Coalite) would be compensated. Or alternatively if all 60,000 are dealt with they would only get 30% of what is owed to them.

Figures provided by pensions expert, Ros Altman, estimate that compensation would be unlikely to cost more than £76 million a year (index linked) for a period over 30 years. The total compensation needed would therefore be just under £2.3 billion. The Government are only providing £20 million a year over 20 years.

Paul Holmes commented:

"Ministers have repeatedly claimed to not want to raise false hopes yet the package they are now proposing could do exactly that – in a year's time workers who have read the headlines and thought they would be compensated will be faced with the fact that they may be one of the 60-70% who will miss out.

"I have been campaigning since 2001 for workers such as those at Dema Glass, Chesterfield Cylinders and Coalite to be compensated - this half baked package is clearly not enough. The Government must come clean about the limitations and how it intends to plug the gap.

"Many workers have faced years of financial uncertainty. To let them down now would be unforgivable

"Pensioners who have been ripped off and lost their pension need proper thought out solutions not vague and inadequate promises from the Government."

Notes

Figures provided by Ros Altman estimate that compensation would be unlikely to cost more than £76 million a year (index linked) for a period over 30 years. The total compensation needed would therefore be just under £2.3 billion.

The Government announced on 14th May that £400m of public money would be paid in instalments over a period of 20 years.

The Government also promised a review of the fund in 3 years time and the possibility of contributions from industry.

The Liberal Democrats have tabled 3 amendments to the Government's proposed package on pension compensation.

If passed these amendments will seek to ensure:

The first compensation payments should be made when the Pensions Act provisions come into force

The basis upon which compensation will be paid should mirror that proposed for those who get help, in the future, from the Pension Protection Fund.

That those who lost out when solvent employers shut down schemes will also be covered.

MAKE OR BREAK TIME FOR LOCAL WORKERS ROBBED OF THEIR PENSIONS 6th May 2004

Local MP Paul Holmes has continued the fight for Pensions Justice for local workers at Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite who have lost much of their Occupational Pension.

Paul said "The Pensions Bill has just finished two months of scrutiny by the Pensions Committee. In Committee I argued the case for compensating the 60,000 or so workers who have lost out around the country as a result of their company becoming insolvent since 1997. A case I have been making since Chesterfield Cylinders (parent company UEF) were among the first to be hit in 2001. I voted for an amendment to the Bill which would have allowed the Government to provide this compensation - but strangely enough the Labour MP's who actually proposed the amendment first tried to WITHDRAW it and then voted with the Government AGAINST their own proposal for compensation!

"Up to now the Government have refused to offer compensation to those who were misled by Government assurances into believing that their Company Pensions were a safe investment for their old age. The Bill now goes back to the full House of Commons and the Liberal Democrats have tabled an amendment for the whole House to vote on. We have deliberately so far put only one name at the head of the Amendment (that of my colleague Steve Webb MP) so that both Labour and Conservative MP's can add their names and make it an all Party proposal for justice.

"Nearly 300 MP's have signed an earlier Commons Motion calling for compensation - including over 200 Labour backbenchers. The acid test now is whether they will actually vote for this when the crucial vote takes place - probably during the next two or three weeks. It is no longer enough to make the right noises about pensions justice - it is time to make their vote count."

(Amendment attached)

To move the following new Clause:-

(1) The Regulator shall provide the Secretary of State with a copy of a list of members of occupational pension schemes ("the List") which meet the conditions in subsection (2).

(2) A scheme whose members shall be eligible to be included on the List is one which-(a) commenced winding up after 5th April 1997, and (b) whose members would have been eligible for pension compensation from the Board of the Pension Protection Fund if the scheme had begun winding up after the day appointed for the purposes of section 113(2) (eligible schemes).

(3) The Regulator shall have the power to require trustees of a scheme which meets the definition in subsection (2) to write to each member of the scheme to advise him of the existence of the List, and of how to apply to have his name included in the List.

(4) Trustees of a scheme which meets the definition in subsection (2) must provide such relevant information to the Regulator as he may require.

(5) The Regulator shall add to the List the name and address of each scheme member who would have been eligible for pension compensation from the Board of the Pension Protection Fund if the scheme had commenced winding up after the day appointed for the purposes of section 113(2) (eligible schemes).

(6) The Secretary of State shall be required to provide financial assistance to each person on the List.

(7) The amount of financial assistance payable to a scheme member under subsection (6) may be prescribed in regulations but shall not be less than the amount to which he would have been entitled if the scheme had qualified for pension compensation from the Board of the Pension Protection Fund.

ACCESS CODE FOR DIGITAL AND CABLE CHANNELS HAS BEEN A LONG TIME COMING

Commenting on today's announcement by Ofcom, that a new ground breaking access code for deaf and hard of hearing people will be introduced, Paul Holmes, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Disability welcomed the move which has come after an extensive consultation period.

Seventy of the most popular digital cable and satellite television channels, including Disney and Hallmark, will have to subtitle a prescribed percentage of their programmes, producing thousands more hours of accessible television.

Ofcom has also decided to set demanding bi-annual targets for the 70 channels. These targets will force digital cable and satellite television channels to deliver increased subtitling services consistently over the next ten years, leading to 80% of programmes subtitled within 10 years.

Paul Holmes stated: "*Deaf and hard of hearing people have been excluded from so much of the programming on these channels for far too long. Ofcom is right to finally introduce a code and targets to ensure that people have proper access to television. After a long campaign led by the RNID Ofcom has listened and real progress in the number of subtitled programmes available on television should be made. Other service providers must follow Ofcom's lead and make their services truly accessible to disabled people.*"

Subtitles can be accessed on analogue television through teletext (888) or on digital television through on-screen menu guides. At present there are very high levels of subtitling on most terrestrial channels, but very variable levels on cable and satellite channels.

Ofcom's Code on Television Access Services covers subtitling, sign language and audio description services.

MANUFACTURING JOBS: LOWEST SINCE RECORDS BEGAN

16th June 2004

The Government is presiding over the worst ever decline in manufacturing, the Liberal Democrats said today.

According to official figures out today, manufacturing jobs have hit the lowest point since records began in 1978. Today's figures from the Office for National Statistics show that manufacturing jobs have halved since 1978. (From 6,892,000 manufacturing jobs in 1978 to 3,371,000 April 2004).

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

"For all the Government's crowing on employment, the manufacturing industry in Britain is collapsing.

"More must be done to help the real economy of our towns and rural areas. Small scale factory closures can have a huge detrimental effect on the local community as the high-profile collapses that make news headlines.

"While manufacturing jobs heamorrhage, Gordon Brown twiddles his thumbs."

1. Figures compiled by the House of Commons Library and commissioned by the Liberal Democrats. The records as set out in Table 6 of the ONS First Release Labour Market Statistics date back to June 1978.

Manufacturing industry employee jobs

UK, seasonally adjusted

Source: *Office for National Statistics, Labour Market Statistics Historical Supplement, Table 6*

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=8288>

COMMITTEE HORROR AT CAPITA CONTRACT AWARD

16th June 2004

Members of the Education and Skills Select Committee reacted with horror today at the news that CAPITA had been awarded the contract to administer the nationwide delivery of the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

David Normington (Permanent Secretary at the DfES) was reminded of the previously damning Select Committee Report on the Individual Learning Account fiasco which had castigated CAPITA for the weaknesses in its software and call centre, when delivering what was a badly designed scheme wide open to fraud.

Commenting later Liberal Democrat Committee member Paul Holmes said

"It was only yesterday in a Parliamentary debate on the failures of the Child Support Agency that I raised with the Minister the appalling Government track record on outsourcing IT functions. In that instance I was questioning the appalling record of EDS in failing to provide an efficient and working system despite delivering the system two years late and being paid £450 million of taxpayers money to do so. I made the specific comparison to CAPITA's similar failure as highlighted in the Education and Skills Select Committee Report on ILA's.

"It seems that there are so few companies in this market that the Government just keep going back to them whatever blunders they make."

Debate on the impact of Government policy on older women

6.33 pm 14th September 2004

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield) (LD): I shall try to be as concise as possible in the few minutes that are left. The background to this debate is that the pension system in this country is in crisis. There are two legs to the pension system. The basic state pension is completely inadequate, as we have often heard, and the mean-tested pension credit system, which the Government favour as the solution to that, is failing to reach almost 2 million of the poorest pensioners in the country.

Private pensions, which are needed to take people above the basic state pension, are also experiencing many problems. Not enough people save for a private pension, not enough people save soon enough, and not enough people save enough. Those who do have been hit by stock market problems, by the Chancellor's £5 billion pension fund raid, by the mis-selling scandals that resulted from the previous Conservative's Government deregulation of the selling of pensions, and by the loss of occupational pensions more recently, which has affected constituents of mine who work at Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite.

All that is leading to a spiral of decline in the private pension sector. One of my constituents who worked for Dema Glass received on her 60th birthday, instead of a letter telling her how much pension she would get, a letter telling her that she would get no pension at all or at best 30 per cent. at some time in the future, but it was not certain when. As a result, her daughter, who is in her mid-20s and works for a very good international firm based in Chesterfield, said, "I was going to take out a private pension with the company but what's the point? If that can happen to my mother after a lifetime's saving, there's no point me saving." Confidence must be restored in the private pensions system if that is to be overcome.

If all that is true of pensioners in general, and of male pensioners, it is even more true of female pensioners, as we have heard.

Sixty per cent. of pensioners get a bad deal, but most of them are women. Women make up 64 per cent. of the overall pensioner population, but a far higher percentage of the poorest pensioners. Typically, women receive 57 per cent. of the male pension, while only 12 per cent. of women get the full basic state pension in their own right; 25 per cent. of single women pensioners live in poverty. A recent joint report from Age Concern and the Fawcett Society showed that women accounted for 75 per cent. of pensioners on income support. As we have heard today, the origins of that lie in the earlier role of women, who used normally to work in low-paid and part-time jobs and would take long stretches of time out to care for children and other members of the family, the elderly and the sick.

14 Sept 2004 : Column 1225

We have heard that that may change, but very slowly. The women of today begin work on much more equal terms, with equal pay and a different attitude to life. It will take 30 or 40 years for that to feed through, so that they receive decent pensions in their own right when they retire. The Minister and his colleagues, with the exception of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), have said in the past two or three hours that they are happy with that situation. They are happy with what they are doing for pensioners, and happy with the fact that any benefits that are generated will take 30 or 40 years to have an effect. In the meantime nearly 2 million pensioners, most of them women, must continue to live in poverty.

I hope that the Minister will have time to answer a specific question. The Minister for Pensions was full of praise for the Pension Service and its attempts to break down the barrier of means-tested benefits and get people on to pension credit. I have said the same in the House and in Committee debates. I have observed the good work that the service is doing in Chesterfield, for instance. Last Wednesday, however, along with two of the Minister's Back-Bench colleagues, I met members of the Public and Commercial Services Union. They said that one suggestion relating to the proposed job cuts of between 30,000 and 40,000 would affect workers in the Pension Service. If that innovatory service has indeed proved effective, can the Minister reassure us that it will not be hit? That would undermine the one bit of good work that is being done. I agree with the Minister for Pensions about that.

The recently announced policy of the Liberal Democrats is to give all those over 75—mostly women—a decent pension of £105 a week. That would avoid the present deterrent of means-testing. It has been welcomed across the board—not by the other two major parties in the House, but by financial commentators in the last week. It has been welcomed throughout the press, from the normally Conservative-supporting elements to others, as being realistic, costed and achievable, and as a first step towards a fair basic pension for all.

I hope for the sake of the poorest pensioners—most of them women—that the Minister takes the advice of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead. I hope that he borrows our policy and implements it, because that would

be for the good of the poorest pensioners in the country. If he fails to do that—as I imagine he will—I look forward very much to fighting the election, in a few months' time, on our policy of providing a fair deal for the poorest pensioners in our society. It is the first time that that will have happened. Let me refer to our earlier debate, and add that I also look forward to fighting the election on our policy of scrapping the tuition fees introduced by the Government, and introducing a much fairer system of free access to higher education.

LIB DEMS LAUNCH GENERAL ELECTION PRE-MANIFESTO 14 Sept 2004

Liberal Democrat Leader Charles Kennedy today launched the Liberal Democrat Pre-manifesto - the first important stage in the manifesto process, which will take the Party into the General Election.

MP for Chesterfield, Paul Holmes said: *"This pre-manifesto builds upon the policies that led to our widespread appeal in 2001 in seats as diverse as Chesterfield and Harrogate. Every one of the 'Top Ten' pledges is a direct reflection of the concerns of people on the streets of Chesterfield."*

Speaking at Liberal Democrat Headquarters in Cowley Street, Charles Kennedy said: *"This is an important document setting out the direction of Liberal Democrat thinking leading up to the General Election. It gives a clear insight into the policies we believe would improve the lives of everyone in Britain today. The values underpinning our agenda for Britain are freedom, fairness and trust. Freedom is about giving people the opportunity to make choices for themselves. Fairness is about equal access - a decent health service, a quality education. And trust is about telling the truth when it counts and trusting people to make decisions. These ideas are already working for us. We have tried and tested them. They worked for us to bring victory in the Brent East by election, and in Leicester South. They are working for us now in Hartlepool. As this Labour Government becomes more unpopular, increasingly the challengers are not the Conservatives. The challengers are the Liberal Democrats."*

'Matthew Taylor MP, Chairman of the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary party, who is chairing the development of the manifesto said: *"While the Conservatives squabble amongst themselves over ever-more outlandish schemes, the Liberal Democrats have quietly and confidently set out a clear, costed and popular agenda for Britain. Tried and tested from Brent to Leicester, these are winning policies based on our core values of freedom, fairness and honesty. Both Labour and the Conservatives have failed to set out a clear agenda for Britain - no wonder more and more people are turning to the Liberal Democrats."*

The 'Top Ten' Liberal Democrat manifesto pledges are:

- * Put patients first - Free doctors and nurses from Whitehall meddling
- * Free personal care when you need it - No one forced to sell their home to pay for care
- * No tuition fees, no top-up fees - University affordable for every student
- * More investment in children's early years - Spend the £1 billion Child Trust Fund when it matters most
- * 10,000 more police on the streets - Cutting crime and the fear of crime
- * £25 more on the pension every week at 75 - A million pensioners off means testing
- * Free off-peak local transport - for all pensioners and disabled people
- * Axe the Council Tax - Local Income Tax is both fair and affordable
- * We should not have gone to war in Iraq - It's time to restore trust in the Government
- * Take the environment seriously - Cut pollution, cut congestion, boost renewable energy

For further information see www.libdems.org.uk

TELLING CHILDREN ABOUT DEMENTIA 12 Sept 2004

Local MP, Paul Holmes, today 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 4-10 July 2004, is children younger people and dementia. The Alzheimer's Society, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, will be using the week to help children and younger people understand what dementia is and how it might affect someone they know. The Society has produced new information for children including a video of children talking about dementia in the family, which will be shown in schools.

Paul Holmes said: **"I am very happy to be supporting the Alzheimer's Society in Alzheimer's Awareness Week. We all need to understand that dementia is caused by a disease of the brain and is not a normal part of ageing. We must help everyone – whatever their age – to cope with the impact of dementia."** More than 945 people living in Chesterfield have dementia and more than three times that number are affected by the consequences.

Neil Hunt, Chief Executive of the Alzheimer's Society, said: **"I am very pleased that Paul Holmes is supporting Alzheimer's Awareness Week. Twenty-five years ago, the odds stacked against the Society's survival were almost overwhelming. Today, we have achieved more than our founders might have believed possible. With so many people behind us, we will be able to continue our vital work to improve the lives of people with dementia and their carers."**

notes

The Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading care and research charity for people with dementia and their carers and celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2004.

Over 750,000 people in the UK have dementia. More than half have Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's disease is a disease of the brain that causes 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.

95,000 SINGLE PARENTS SHORT-CHANGED BY CSA

12 September 2004

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, has slammed the Child Support Agency (CSA) for failing the country's poorest single parents.

95,000 single parents who are eligible for extra maintenance, worth up to £10 per week, are being denied that much-needed money because the CSA has not been able to transfer them to its new £450 million computer system.

Paul Holmes MP said:

"It is absolutely shocking that our country's poorest single parents are missing out on £45 million of benefits every year because their claims are not being processed by the CSA.

"The Government made bold claims that their new reforms would turn the performance of the CSA around. The stark reality is that the new, hugely expensive system has failed on all counts.

"The agency has written off over £2 billion of uncollected child maintenance since it was set up. If it is unable to do its job, we must find another way to proceed. It's time the CSA was scrapped and the Inland Revenue was allowed to do the sums and make sure people pay up on time."

Notes to editors

1. Paul Holmes MP was speaking yesterday as chair of a standing committee that was considering the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2004. For a copy of yesterday's Official Report of this debate please contact Liza Coffin at coffinl@parliament.uk.
2. Figures quoted in this news release are based on evidence gathered by the Work and Pensions Treasury Select Committee and analysis of the CSA's *Annual Report and Accounts 2003-'04*.

3. For further information about the Liberal Democrats proposals for c

LOCAL MP BACKS CAMPAIGN FOR STRONGER PROTECTION FOR UK'S SEAS 12 September 2004

Paul Holmes MP is supporting a new campaign by the UK's leading conservation organisations to improve protection of our seas. With World Oceans Day taking place on 8 June, there is no better time to highlight the inadequacy of the laws which protect and manage what goes on around our shores, and the need for comprehensive new legislation to do a better job.

Paul said: **"I wholeheartedly support Wildlife and Countryside Link's marine campaign, and I have added my name to House of Commons Early Day Motion 171 which calls on the Government to introduce comprehensive new laws at the earliest opportunity to protect and manage the marine environment in an integrated and sustainable manner. It is fantastic that this motion is supported by almost 300 MPs from across the political parties."**

The richness of the UK's seas is beyond doubt. They are home to fifty per cent of our wildlife – more than 40,000 species - including seabirds, seals, basking sharks, whales and dolphins, sea-horses, deep sea fish, sea anemones, sponges and cold water corals.

However, current laws to protect this wildlife are piecemeal and often outdated. Our marine wildlife needs better protection in the face of ever-increasing pressure on its habitats from overfishing, pollution, development, dredging, and other activities.

Paul commented further: "Our seas are the last living wilderness but they are being damaged and exploited in an unsustainable way. Changing the way we manage them would allow us to do much more than simply conserve wildlife, important though that is. New laws could also help to untangle the net of complicated regulations which face marine industries.

"There is space at sea for a whole range of different activities, but they must be managed in a way which avoids conflict. A proper framework will allow wildlife conservation, recreational use of the marine environment and essential economic activities at sea to go hand in hand, addressing potential difficulties before they arise."

notes

Wildlife and Countryside Link

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together environmental voluntary organisations in the UK united by their common interest in the conservation and enjoyment of the natural and historic environment. Its aim is to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the voluntary sector through collaboration. Through Link, groups of people from different organisations get together to exchange information, develop and promote policies, and work to effect change. Contact details: Wildlife and Countryside Link, 89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP Tel: 020 7820 8600 Fax: 020 7820 8620 Email: annie.smith@wcl.org.uk .

The Link marine campaign is supported by the following members of Wildlife and Countryside Link: Buglife – the Invertebrate Conservation Trust, the Environmental Investigation Agency, the Herpetological Conservation Trust, Marine Connection, the Marine Conservation Society, the RSPB, the Shark Trust, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, The Wildlife Trusts and WWF. Wildlife and Countryside Link is working closely with its sister body, Wales Environment Link, in coordinating this England & Wales campaign for primary legislative change, and Scottish Environment Link is running a parallel campaign calling for improved protection and management of Scotland's seas.

Link's marine legislation campaign calls for a comprehensive package of reforms, including:

A co-ordinated approach and overall vision for the UK's marine resource, which includes an ecosystem-based approach to managing the marine environment.

Better, properly enforced, marine legislation, including the designation of protected areas and better species protection.

A spatial planning system to enable strategic and integrated management of the seas, prioritising some areas for development and others for wildlife conservation. A new system for managing inshore fisheries. New governance arrangements.

A new information leaflet 'The Last Living Wilderness – A Future for Our Seas' and further information about the campaign can be obtained on the Link website at www.wcl.org.uk. Further information about the Link campaign can also be obtained from Annie Smith (020 7820 8620, or annie.smith@wcl.org.uk).

World Oceans Day - 8 June 2004

Nominated by the United Nations, World Oceans Day is a global celebration of the planet's marine environment. World Oceans Day was first announced at the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. It raises awareness of the World's oceans and their importance for wildlife and all life on Earth.

hild support reform, visit www.libdems.org.uk or email coffinl@parliament.uk.

PAUL HOLMES MP ENCOURAGES CHESTERFIELD BUSINESSES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR MANUFACTURING EXCELLENCE 17 September 2004

Paul Holmes MP is urging manufacturing companies in Chesterfield to test their competitiveness in the marketplace by entering the Institution of Mechanical Engineers' (IMechE) Manufacturing Excellence (MX2005) Awards.

Now in its 26th year, the Manufacturing Excellence Awards evaluates UK manufacturers' competitiveness in best practice and innovation across nine industrial disciplines; customer focus; product innovation; process innovation; resource efficiency; people effectiveness; IT; change management; financial performance and best partnership between business and education.

All manufacturing companies based in the UK are eligible to enter, no matter their size, and there is a special award to encourage SMEs to grow and prosper. All companies will receive a free confidential benchmarking report to ensure they are performing to the acknowledged standards of best practice.

Paul said: *"Manufacturing is vitally important to the UK economy. Not only does it account for 20% of GDP, but the UK cannot continue to prosper in the international marketplace relying on service industries alone. "Awards such as these reward the hard work and efforts of all those in manufacturing in the UK. Manufacturing is vital for my constituency, for the direct, and indirect, number of people employed within this sector. Therefore I encourage those involved to enter the Manufacturing Excellence Awards to receive the recognition of excellence they deserve."*

Notes

1. The manufacturing sector employs people in every county across the UK, and in certain regions it is the major employer. Manufacturing is at the heart of UK plc. It generates two-thirds for the value of the UK's exports, directly employs over 4 million people and accounts for 20% of GDP.

2. Entrance to MX2005 is free and supported by a prestigious group of organisation including the Department of Trade and Industry, the EEF, the Manufacturing Advisory Service and the Manufacturing Foundation.

3. To enter the MX2005 awards, or to apply for the free benchmark service, please contact Stephanie Levin, Project Executive, at the IMechE on tel: 0207 304 6815 or visit www.mx2005.org

4. The awards will be presented in June 2005, at a ceremony at the Dorchester Hotel, London.

DECLINE IN MANUFACTURING CONTINUES UNABATED 15th

September 2004

Official figures from the Government today show that nearly 1/4 million (224,000) manufacturing jobs were lost in the last 2 years.

In July 2002 there were 3,584,000 manufacturing jobs and the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics reveal that there were 3,360,000 manufacturing jobs in July 2004. Commenting, Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said: "***The Government is turning a blind eye to the thousands of jobs going to the wall. The steep decline in manufacturing jobs strikes at the heart of local communities. Small-scale factory closures can devastate local areas. The Government cannot continue to allow the manufacturing sector to collapse. It must take action to help the real economy of our towns and cities.***"

Notes

1. ONS Labour Market Statistics September 2004

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July 2002 there were 3,584,000 manufacturing jobs and the latest figures

reveal that there were 3,360,000 manufacturing jobs in July 2004.

F26 Welfare to Work Programmes

Federal Policy Committee

Mover: Paul Holmes MP (Shadow Minister for Employment) ([full speech](#))

Conference notes that the first of the New Deal programmes was introduced in 1998 with three main aims – to help young unemployed people into jobs; to improve their prospects of staying and progressing in employment; and to increase the long-term employability of young unemployed people, thereby making a positive contribution to sustainable levels of employment and to a reduction in social exclusion

Conference deplors the fact that the New Deal has failed to achieve these laudable aims, with less than half of New Deal leavers in the quarter up to September 2003 achieving sustainable employment, and those with the greatest barriers to employment receiving the least funding.

Conference believes that the money spent on the New Deal could be better spent on a new system of helping people back into work, so that those who are job-ready have access to short-term assistance focused on their needs, whilst those with greater barriers to employment have access to a more extensive programme.

Conference therefore proposes that:

1. The New Deal is refocused into a new 'Individual Work scheme', replacing the 'one size fits all' which currently exists.
2. JobcentrePlus is entrusted with those who are 'job-ready', and is better supported in offering short-term intensive assistance to gain employment and encouraging employers to open up more opportunities.
3. A more flexible and intensive programme is developed to help those experiencing severe difficulties gaining employment, particularly disabled people, lone parents, ethnic minorities and the over-50s.
4. Those advising harder-to-help jobseekers are given flexibility in designing individual programmes, and are not bound by set procedures, allowing, for instance, longer contact periods with jobseekers.
5. The heart of the approach for harder-to-help jobseekers is one-to-one support between the adviser and the jobseeker, aiming to build up the jobseeker's confidence and skills.
6. Advisers aim to build up an understanding of the type of work the jobseeker would be suited to, improving the chances of finding meaningful and therefore sustainable employment.
7. New Deal sanctions which alienate jobseekers and reduce compliance are replaced with incentives to abide by the terms of the scheme, helping jobseekers to feel involved in the programme.

The motion was clearly carried

Applicability: Federal.

Paul's Conference Speech

21st September 2004 - Reform of New Deal

This Government is characterised for most people by three things:

1. Lack of trust 2. Spin 3. and - Control freakery with for example its central target setting which constantly distorts the delivery of Health, Education and Policing. NEW Labour's, NEW Deal policies epitomise this pursuit of soundbites over substance, of false promises and of distorting and pointless Tick Box Targets.

Certainly the New Deal is better than the Tory neglect in the 1980's and 1990's, when poor quality schemes such as YTS and YOP's were little more than scams to fiddle the unemployment figures.

It would be hard NOT to improve upon that.

But much of the New Deal has proved to be window dressing and spin. Don't take my word for it – read the reports from the National Audit Office, the Work and Pensions Select Committee -OR - read the now numerous research documents produced by the Department of Work and Pensions itself!

Let me give you a flavour of some of their findings:

What for example of the repeated Government boast that the New Deal for Young People has succeeded, in getting over a ¼ of a million under 25's off benefit and into work?

As the Labour controlled Education and Employment Committee reported in 2001 “there was a clear trend of ...falling unemployment for 18-24 year olds since 1994 – long before the introduction of New Deal.”

In 2000, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimated “that of those leaving unemployment, up to 80% WOULD have done so anyway in the absence of the New Deal programme.

The National Audit Office in 2002 reported, that only around 14% of under 25's found jobs directly because of the New Deal. Most of the other 86% it said, ‘would have found work anyway because of turnover in the Labour Market and growth in the economy.’

The findings are similar for the other major New Deal programme, New Deal 25+.

In short, over £¾ of a Billion per year is now being spent on New Deal programmes which see the already ‘Job Ready’ get into work fairly easily - as they would do anyway when the job market is buoyant. But, as another DWP study found in 2002, these schemes, in the view of DWP staff and training providers, “largely fail to help those over 50, those with severe basic skill needs and those requiring intermediate or higher level skill training.”

Job Centre Plus Personal Advisors, in different parts of the country, have told me, that the tick box culture means that the ‘job ready’ are given priority so that centrally imposed Government Targets can appear to be met – while the hard to place fail to get the support they need. A telling figure from the 2003 DWP annual statistics is that the Disabled get just 3% of the New Deal budget.

The New Deal is giving the LEAST HELP to the MOST NEEDY.
So what should we as Liberal Democrats do to help the unemployed?

We could look back to nineteenth century liberalism for the answer – as some seem to favour. Then the Benthamites, decided that the soaring cost of Poor Relief was due to scroungers abusing the system. So

with the New Poor Law in 1834 they introduced the Workhouse Test. The aim was to make life on poor relief so harsh that most of the unemployed would set off, with a copy of Samuel Smiles' book on 'Self Help' under their arm, and get a job.

As economic liberal ideas go it was utter nonsense then, just as it was when Thatcher and Tebbit used virtually identical language. Soaring unemployment in 1834, as in 1984, was a result of structural and cyclical unemployment and of the skills gaps that major economic change brought in its wake.

Republicans in the USA still think it's the fault of the poor that they are unemployed and poor. Their 'Welfare to Work' experiments have inspired some of Gordon Brown's policies. I hope Gordon isn't listening today or New Labour might add a New Poor Law to the New Deal.

In fact of course they already are doing so, with the massive extension of Benefit Sanctions. An imminent 'Big Stick' approach to Incapacity Benefit claimants is what we are told the real reason why Andrew Smith recently resigned from the Government. HE believed that some of the pilot schemes such as Pathway to Work were proving successful in getting long term IB claimants back into work – by offering help and support rather than by threatening them or slashing their benefits.

Perhaps Andrew had read his own Department's reports, on the negative impact of Benefit sanctions? Such as those published in March 2001, April 2001 and Dec 2002? Perhaps he read the University College London study in April this year, that demonstrated a link, between claimants disappearing from the register due to sanctions, and a 2-3% increase in crime?

Studies show that sanctions drive the most needy into the black economy, into crime, back into drug and alcohol abuse, into homelessness. Cut – already low benefits – to parents, and their children are inevitably penalised too.

Conference, the detail in this motion speaks for itself. Job Centre Plus would remain as the Gateway for those seeking Job and Benefit advice. But we would refocus the £3/4 Billion of New Deal money into support for those who need most help in accessing the job market via 'Individual Work Schemes.'

This is not an unproven project. The Shaw Trust, the biggest job broker for disabled people in the country has shown what can be done. So have the Groundwork Trust in their 50 projects. I was impressed by the approach of Working Links in a London Employment Zone that I visited.

Phoenix are doing excellent work with hard to place clients in Chesterfield and North Derbyshire, and are running the innovative Progress2Work scheme for former drug abusers. I have met JC+ Personal Advisers in Chesterfield who are doing outstanding work with disabled people on the Pathways to Work pilot.

But all of these successful projects are of restricted scale. If the Government really believed in evidence based policy making they would extend these schemes across the country. Instead they are cutting funding to some and pursuing right wing media headlines with threats of ever harsher sanctions instead.

As a nation we cannot afford to continue to ignore the plight of those who face the greatest difficulty in gaining work, including the 1.2 million disabled people who want to work. It is unjust to them, and, with an ageing population profile, it is an appalling waste of the nation's human capital.

I urge you to support this motion.

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The National Audit Office in 2002 reported, that only around 14% of under 25's found jobs directly because of the New Deal. Most of the other 86% it said, ‘would have found work anyway because of turnover in the Labour Market and growth in the economy.’

The findings are similar for the other major New Deal programme, New Deal 25+.

In short, over £¾ of a Billion per year is now being spent on New Deal programmes which see the already ‘Job Ready’ get into work fairly easily - as they would do anyway when the job market is buoyant. But, as another DWP study found in 2002, these schemes, in the view of DWP staff and training providers, “largely fail to help those over 50, those with severe basic skill needs and those requiring intermediate or higher level skill training.”

Job Centre Plus Personal Advisors, in different parts of the country, have told me, that the tick box culture means that the ‘job ready’ are given priority so that centrally imposed Government Targets can appear to be met – while the hard to place fail to get the support they need. A telling figure from the 2003 DWP annual statistics is that the Disabled get just 3% of the New Deal budget.

The New Deal is giving the LEAST HELP to the MOST NEEDY.

So what should we as Liberal Democrats do to help the unemployed?

We could look back to nineteenth century liberalism for the answer – as some seem to favour. Then the Benthamites, decided that the soaring cost of Poor Relief was due to scroungers abusing the system. So with the New Poor Law in 1834 they introduced the Workhouse Test. The aim was to make life on poor relief so harsh that most of the unemployed would set off, with a copy of Samuel Smiles' book on ‘Self Help’ under their arm, and get a job.

As economic liberal ideas go it was utter nonsense then, just as it was when Thatcher and Tebbit used virtually identical language. Soaring unemployment in 1834, as in 1984, was a result of structural and cyclical unemployment and of the skills gaps that major economic change brought in its wake.

Republicans in the USA still think it's the fault of the poor that they are unemployed and poor. Their 'Welfare to Work' experiments have inspired some of Gordon Browns policies. I hope Gordon isn't listening today or New Labour might add a New Poor Law to the New Deal.

In fact of course they already are doing so, with the massive extension of Benefit Sanctions. An imminent 'Big Stick' approach to Incapacity Benefit claimants is we are told the real reason why Andrew Smith recently resigned from the Government. HE believed that some of the pilot schemes such as Pathway to Work were proving successful in getting long term IB claimants back into work – by offering help and support rather than by threatening them or slashing their benefits.

Perhaps Andrew had read his own Departments reports, on the negative impact of Benefit sanctions? Such as those published in March 2001, April 2001 and Dec 2002? Perhaps he read the University College London study in April this year, that demonstrated a link, between claimants disappearing from the register due to sanctions, and a 2-3% increase in crime?

Studies show that sanctions drive the most needy into the black economy, into crime, back into drug and alcohol abuse, into homelessness. Cut – already low benefits – to parents, and their children are inevitably penalised too.

Conference, the detail in this motion speaks for itself. Job Centre Plus would remain as the Gateway for those seeking Job and Benefit advice. But we would refocus the £3/4 Billion of New Deal money into support for those who need most help in accessing the job market via 'Individual Work Schemes.'

This is not an unproven project. The Shaw Trust, the biggest job broker for disabled people in the country has shown what can be done. So have the Groundwork Trust in their 50 projects. I was impressed by the approach of Working Links in a London Employment Zone that I visited.

Phoenix are doing excellent work with hard to place clients in Chesterfield and North Derbyshire, and are running the innovative Progress2Work scheme for former drug abusers. I have met JC+ Personal Advisers in Chesterfield who are doing outstanding work with disabled people on the Pathways to Work pilot.

But all of these successful projects are of restricted scale. If the Government really believed in evidence based policy making they would extend these schemes across the country. Instead they are cutting funding to some and pursuing right wing media headlines with threats of ever harsher sanctions instead.

As a nation we cannot afford to continue to ignore the plight of those who face the greatest difficulty in gaining work, including the 1.2 million disabled people who want to work. It is unjust to them, and, with an ageing population profile, it is an appalling waste of the nation's human capital.

I urge you to support this motion.

ROYAL HOSPITAL SHELVES PLANS FOR LIFE-SAVING STROKE CARE SERVICE 11 October 2004

Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital is one of fewer than 10% nationally that does not have a stroke unit.

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield has called for a rethink of the Royal Hospital's decision to shelve plans for the construction of a ward that would provide specialised care for stroke patients.

Paul said: "The Royal Hospital's decision could have grave consequences for the people of Chesterfield. "According to the Stroke Association, of every 16 stroke patients admitted to a general hospital, there will be one extra death compared with a coordinated Stroke Unit. A specialised stroke unit is able to provide therapeutic services, such as speech therapy, that

can vastly improve the recovery of stroke patients. Yet the Royal Hospital has decided to shelve plans to dedicate a new ward to the provision of specialised stroke care. As the Stroke Association battles to raise awareness about stroke prevention during national Stroke Awareness Week, the Royal Hospital is neglecting to provide Chesterfield with vital care that can save lives.”

Notes:

1. The following letter was sent by Paul Holmes MP to Eric Morton, Chief Executive of the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust, dated 6 October '04:

I am writing to express concern at the Royal Hospital's apparent decision to shelve plans to build an acute stroke unit.

I understand that current acute stroke provision at the Royal does not meet the definition of an acute stroke unit as described by both the Healthcare Commission and the British Association of Stroke Physicians. As such the Royal Hospital is one of fewer than 10% nationally that does not have a stroke unit. Could you confirm whether this is correct or not?

According to the Stroke Association, of every 16 stroke patients admitted to a general hospital, there will be one extra death compared with a coordinated Stroke Unit. A specialised stroke unit is able to provide therapeutic services, such as speech therapy, that can vastly improve the recovery of stroke patients.

The National Service Framework for Older People required that by March 2004 all general hospitals that care for older people with stroke should have a specialised stroke unit as described in the Stroke Service Model. In response to a written parliamentary question (8 November 2003) Stephen Ladyman MP stated that he would expect a stroke unit would comprise:

“a consultant physician with specialist knowledge of stroke formally recognised as having principal responsibility for stroke services. This consultant would be supported by a multidisciplinary team who are specialists in stroke care.”

I am pleased to learn that plans to build three new wards at the Royal Hospital are going ahead, but, as a matter of urgency, could you to explain the reasoning behind your decision to shelve plans for the provision of acute stroke services in one of these new wards. Can you indicate when the Royal will establish a dedicated stroke unit, and so cease to be one of the 10% of the country without such provision?

Yours sincerely
Paul Holmes MP

2. Stroke Awareness Week 2004 is being held from 4-10 October. For more information visit: http://www.stroke.org.uk/campaigns/stroke_awareness_week_2004

3. Stroke – facts and figures:

- o Each year over 130,000 people in England and Wales have a first stroke. About 10,000 of these are under retirement age.
- o There are close to 60,000 deaths due to stroke each year.
- o Stroke is the third most common cause of death in England and Wales, after heart disease and cancer.
- o Stroke accounts for over 8 per cent of all deaths in men and 13 per cent of deaths in women in England

- o Stroke is the largest single cause of severe disability in England and Wales, with over 250,000 people being affected at any one time.
- o Stroke patients occupy around 20 per cent of all acute hospital beds and 25 per cent of long term beds.
- o Of every 16 stroke patients admitted to a general hospital, there will be one extra death compared with a coordinated Stroke Unit.

All figures are taken from the Stroke Association's website:
http://www.stroke.org.uk/media_centre/facts_and_figures/

LOCAL MP DEMANDS ANSWERS TO VICAR LANE OUTRAGE

11 October 2004

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, has condemned the private owners of Vicar Lane for harassing an innocent tourist.

A German visitor who was in Chesterfield enjoying the 800th Market Charter Festival, was harassed by security guards employed by the Vicar Lane Shopping Centre for taking photographs in the reportedly privately owned Vicar Lane area.

Paul Holmes said:“The very fact that an apparently public area such as Vicar Lane could be privately owned is absolutely outrageous. Our public streets should not be for sale. “I am astounded that the exclusive private nature of this deceptively public street has not been made clear to members of the public, whether they are local residents or tourists.

“I would like to know how on earth the security of a shopping street is threatened by an innocent visitor taking a photograph of a work of art? Does the Vicar Lane Shopping Centre routinely harass parents photographing their children on the street? The people of Chesterfield deserve some answers.”

Notes:

The following letter was sent by Paul Holmes MP to Elaine Retallic, Deputy Manager of Vicar Lane Shopping Centre, dated Monday 4 October '04:

Dear Elaine,

I am writing to you regarding the newspaper report in the Derbyshire Times last Thursday. According to the report the Vicar Lane area is privately owned by your company and you have a policy of not even allowing passers by to take photographs without advance permission. On this particular occasion your security guards harassed a German visitor who was in Chesterfield enjoying the 800th Market Charter Festival.

I hope you can reassure me that this is not in fact your policy.

Firstly, it is outrageous that a public street should be privately owned. The shops and buildings I can happily accept but not a street that links one area of town to another. I have seen shopping developments like this in other towns where barriers close the area off outside of shopping hours, but this is not the case in Chesterfield. Can you confirm that if you regard this street as exclusive private property that your company also pays for the policing of it in the evenings and on occasional days when the shops are not open? This would be essential to safeguard members of the public using your 'private street' in the mistaken assumption that it was a public right of way. Our hard pressed Police do not have the resources to patrol inside private property even if the law and the taxpayer allowed them to.

Secondly, it is outrageous that the exclusive private nature of this apparently public street is not clearly made known to local residents and out of town visitors alike. I have lived in Chesterfield for a quarter of a century and was a local Cllr. for 12 years, which overlapped with the period when the previous Labour Council negotiated with your company the deal to develop the historic Vicar Lane area. Despite that I never knew that this apparently public street was in fact a 'restricted', private and apparently unwelcoming area.

Finally, can you clarify the reasoning behind your daytime security guards harassing a tourist? In the press you said it was a matter of security. How on earth is the security of a shopping street compromised by taking a photograph of a work of art? Do you routinely harass parents photographing their children on the street? I would have thought you would want to attract customers not deter them by such a ridiculous policy?

I hope you can reassure myself and other local residents that this was in fact an unfortunate misunderstanding and not deliberate company policy.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Holmes MP

MORE THAN 1/2 MILLION OF WORKING AGE WITHOUT WORK IN EAST MIDLANDS 13th October 2004

New employment figures out today being trumpeted by the Government as 'showing the continued strength of the UK labour market' ignore more than 1/2 million people of working age in the East Midlands who are not working.

Government records for the 'economically inactive', defined by the Government as people who are neither in *employment* nor *unemployed*, show that numbers have reached 540,000 people – up by 20,000 in the last year.

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

“Hundreds of thousands of people in the East Midlands have been betrayed by this Labour Government. It's shocking that so many people have been ignored and sidelined. The Government shouts about how well it is managing employment levels but turns a blind eye to the millions of working age who are not working. There are shocking numbers of people who are not working and not in the Government's official unemployment figures. This may be evidence that benefit sanctions only drive people towards the black market. The New Deal is in dire need of reform. Forcing people to jump through hoops is not the answer to unemployment.”

Notes

Figures are from today's ONS 'Labour Market Statistics October 2004' for the East Midlands, and research conducted by the House of Commons Library

Economically inactive UK, seasonally adjusted

Aged 16-59/64 thousands

Jun-Aug 1997 510

Jun-Aug 2003 520

Jun-Aug 2004 540

Change on year 20

Change since 1997 30

The Government defines 'economically inactive' as "People who are neither in *employment* nor *unemployed*. This includes those who want a job but have not been seeking work in the last four weeks, those who want a job and are seeking work but not available to start work, and those who do not want a job.

HOLMES - TRAFFIC JAMS TOMORROW AS EXTENT OF DAMAGED ROADS REVEALED

22 October 2004

New figures uncovered by the Liberal Democrats reveal that there are a shocking 4,315 kilometres of damaged roads in the East Midlands.

An astounding 21% of roads across England, totalling 60 thousand kilometres, have been identified as needing structural maintenance, meaning vast lengths of dangerous roads and the potential for more traffic jams and disruption for England's motorists.

Commenting on the figures Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield said:

"These figures show just how much of our local and national road network needs urgent repairs.

"The Government must take steps to improve road conditions as poor roads are potentially dangerous for all road users including cyclists, pedestrians and motorists.

"Rather than funding costly and often unnecessary road expansion the Government should focus its resources on fixing the nearly 60 thousand kilometres of damaged roads."

Notes

1. Roads with Structural Damage that requires repair in the East Midlands - Latest Figures (2003)

Damaged Road Length (%)				Damaged Road Length (Kilometres)			
East Midlands							
A Roads	B&C Roads	Unc Roads	Total	A Roads	B&C Roads	Unc Roads	Total
16%					16%		
						3%	
14%	466	1,541	2,308		4,315		

2. Details of Roads with Structural Damage that requires repair in Derbyshire compared to the total in England (exc. London) - Latest Figures (2003)

Damaged Road Length (%)				Damaged Road Length (Kilometres)			
Authority	A Roads	B&C Roads	Unc Roads	Total	A Roads	B&C Roads	Unc Roads
Derby	1 %		12%		14%	13%	0
11	80		92				
Derbyshire exc Derby	18%	11%		16%		15%	92
198	490		780				
TOTAL (England exc. London)	10%		22%		23%		21%
	2,747		38,259		59,064		

3. Road Maintenance in England

Local authorities in England reported net current expenditure on highways maintenance in 2002-03 as £1,949 million [Source: 2002-03 Revenue Outturn (R02) form]

A survey of almost half of all local authorities by the Asphalt Industry Alliance found that there had been a shortfall of £1.1 billion per year in road maintenance across Britain. [Source: Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) Survey 2003]

A survey of local authorities conducted by the Institution of Civil Engineers estimated the backlog of road and bridge maintenance to be £5.5 billion. [Institution of Civil Engineers, *Local Transport and Public Realm Survey 2002*, www.ice.org.uk]

This would mean, with 59 thousand kilometres of roads in need of structural repair, a cost to each local authority of £93,200 per kilometre. This would mean a potential cost to:

Derbyshire (exc. Derby) of £72,696,000

East Midlands of £402,158,000

4. Parliamentary Question; 5 July 2004.

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many (a) kilometres of local roads, (b) bridges and (c) footways have been restored by local authorities using money in the Local Transport Plan settlement for capital maintenance work on local highways for (i) 2002-03 and (ii) 2003-04 (A) in total and (B) for each local authority. [180847]

Mr. Jamieson: These figures are not available for England. Progress in restoring local roads and footways is measured by Best Value Performance Indicators and in restoring bridges by the outstanding numbers of bridges requiring strengthening or major maintenance. I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses two tables showing the latest information for English local highway authorities outside London as contained in the annual progress reports on Local Transport Plans submitted in July 2003.

Highway maintenance in London is a matter for the Mayor and the Greater London Assembly. In Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales it is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

LIB DEMS STAND UNITED AGAINST BLACK WATCH REDEPLOYMENT

27 October 2004

All 55 Liberal Democrat MPs have tabled a parliamentary motion opposing the Government's decision to send British troops into the American zone of Iraq, and calling for a vote in Parliament on the decision.

This comes as the Black Watch make final preparations for Operation Bracken, their redeployment from southern Iraq to an area some 20 miles south of Baghdad.

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield said: *“Local people have contacted me to express their concerns about the movement of British troops to the American zone in Iraq. “Some have asked why are 850 British troops needed to bail out 130,000 US soldiers? The timing of this – just before the Presidential election - makes it look more like a bid to bolster Bush’s vote on the Home Front, rather than a genuine military necessity at the War Front.*

The Liberal Democrats have said consistently that British troops should remain directly under British control in the British sector.

The Government’s decision to send British troops into Northern Iraq is a significant policy change which should have been subject to a vote in the House of Commons.

The Liberal Democrats are united in their opposition to this illegal and unnecessary war, and we stand united against the redeployment of the Black Watch troops.”

Notes

The following motion was tabled on Monday 25 October in the names of all 55 Liberal Democrat MPs:

That this House recalls its decision of 18th March 2003, opposed by the Liberal Democrats and others of all parties, to support “the decision of Her Majesty's Government that the United Kingdom should use all means necessary to ensure the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction”; notes the recent decision of Her Majesty’s Government to deploy British troops in Central Iraq to relieve United States forces for other operations; notes that the request for this deployment has not come from United Kingdom commanders in Iraq in the British sector of responsibility but from the United States and for operational reasons in the United States sector of responsibility; commends and supports the excellent work of British forces in Iraq, in difficult and dangerous conditions; recognises that British troops are currently heavily engaged and that the security situation in Multi-National Division (South East) may deteriorate as the date for elections nears; believes that all British forces should remain under British command in Multi-National Division (South East) and none should be deployed as requested by the United States; believes that the House should have the opportunity to express its view on a deployment which represents a significant change of strategy and policy through a vote;

reiterates its commitment to the establishment of full democracy in Iraq as soon as possible and thereafter the phased withdrawal of British troops; and believes that greater United Nations involvement in political and economic reconstruction and in bringing greater security and stability to Iraq is essential.

LOCAL MP URGES WOMEN TO TAKE UP BREAST SCREENING APPOINTMENTS 28 October 2004

Paul Holmes MP has joined forces with Breakthrough Breast Cancer, the UK's leading breast cancer charity, to highlight the need for all women aged 50 and over in Chesterfield to attend their breast-screening appointments when invited.

Breast screening invites are sent to all women aged between 50 and 65 every three years and this is being extended to women up to 70 by the end of 2004.

However, new research from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Breast Cancer and Breakthrough, reveals that in some areas uptake of screening invitations falls as low as 20%. Of those women surveyed who reported not attending their breast screening appointments:

Approximately one in 14 thought they were not in a high risk category for developing the disease – although over 80% of breast cancers occur in women over 50, and your risk of developing the disease increases with age.

9% said they knew their bodies well enough to spot breast cancer – despite the fact that of all breast cancers detected by the screening programme, over half are too small to be felt by the human hand and that a lump in the breast is not the only sign of the disease.

One in 10 said they would rather not know whether they have breast cancer or not – even though the sooner breast cancer is diagnosed and treated the better the chances of survival.

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield said:

“Breast cancer is now the UK's most common cancer with over 40,000 women diagnosed from the disease each year. One in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some stage during their lifetime.

“The earlier breast cancer is detected the better your chances of survival. The NHS Breast Screening Programme is a vital and effective part of the UK's efforts to reduce the death toll from this devastating disease but it's essential women in Chesterfield take advantage of this and attend when invited.”

Notes

1. Breakthrough Breast Cancer is a charity committed to fighting breast cancer through research and education and has established the UK's first dedicated breast cancer research centre. For further information about Breakthrough or breast cancer visit www.breakthrough.org.uk.
2. All women aged 50 or over are encouraged to make full use of the NHS Breast Screening Programme by keeping screening appointments. Routine invitations are sent to all women between 50-64 every three years. This will be extended to up to the age of 70 by the end of 2004. Women aged 70 and over are entitled to and can request, a routine screening appointment every three years, whether or not symptoms are apparent. Your GP can arrange this for you. See www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk for more information about NHS Breast Screening Services.

LOCAL MP SIGNS UP TO YOUTH IN THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN 29

October 2004

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield, is backing *Young People Now* magazine's Positive Images campaign by signing a parliamentary early day motion calling on the media to provide a fairer representation of young people across the UK.

New research conducted by Mori and *Young People Now*, found that:

More than 70% of press articles about young people are negative

Young people are only quoted in 8% of stories about them

Young people see the press as finger-wagging, authoritarian and prone to exaggeration

Paul Holmes said: *"I am delighted to give my support to this important campaign. I know from my experience of 22 years as a Derbyshire teacher that the majority of young people are polite, law-abiding and a credit to us all - it is right that they are fairly represented by the media. We should not let the minority cloud our view. Wall-to-wall coverage of young people as members of teenage gangs and violent criminals risks stigmatising a whole generation. There is a danger that this inaccurate portrayal of Britain's youth will lead to catch-all policies that discriminate against the vast majority of young people who are just getting on with growing up."*

Notes to editors:

1. EDM 1726 has been signed by a cross-party group of 75 MPs. The text is as follows:

That this House welcomes the Positive Images campaign launched by Young People Now magazine to improve the media coverage of young people noting with concern that research carried out recently by MORI revealed that 70 per cent. of press articles about young people are negative, young people are only quoted in 8 per cent. of stories about them, two thirds of 11 to 18 year olds would not trust a journalist to tell them the truth and young people think the press is finger-wagging, authoritarian and prone to exaggeration; calls upon all media to give a much fairer representation of the qualities of young people across the United Kingdom.

LIB DEMS VOTE AGAINST GAMBLING BILL 01 November 2004

Tonight the Liberal Democrats will be voting against the Gambling Bill after its second reading in the House of Commons. Whilst the Party welcomes a large part of the Bill, we have significant concerns about the Government's regional casino proposals.

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield said:

"The Liberal Democrats have major concerns about the Gambling Bill's regional casino proposals. There are an estimated 300,000 problem gamblers nationally and the Labour Government's proposals threaten to increase this number. Each problem gambler costs the State an estimated £35,000, yet the Government has refused to place a cap on the number of regional casinos. Casinos located within the hearts of our towns and cities could have a potentially negative impact on neighbouring communities, who may suffer late-night noise and disturbance.

The Liberal Democrats have moved an amendment explaining our concerns. We will vote against the Gambling Bill tonight."

Notes

1. The Government's own research shows that casinos that are located in very accessible and central locations and offer 'casual gambling' pose a heightened threat of gambling addiction. Other social costs can include

late-night noise and disturbance. However, local authorities do not have sufficient powers to consider these factors in licensing casinos.

2. At 2nd Reading the Liberal Democrats will move a reasoned amendment explaining their concerns about the Gambling Bill. If the Bill passes 2nd Reading the Party will work hard to amend it during Committee Stage.

HOLMES BACKS STAND AGAINST PORK IMPORTS

- Two thirds would be illegal to produce in the UK - 01 November 2004

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield, is supporting the region's pig farmers by backing a campaign against pork imports produced with welfare standards lower than those in force in the UK.

Two thirds of all imports of pig meat (*pork, bacon and processed pork products*) would be illegal to produce in the UK according to a report recently published by BPEX, the British Pig Executive.

This is of particular concern, given the 14% rise in imports of pig meat in 2003. *According to the BPEX report, imports now account for 58% of all pork, bacon and processed products consumed in the UK.*

Paul Holmes said:

"I believe that consumers should be able to make an informed choice when buying pork. It's clear that the majority of people are concerned about the welfare standards of the animals. The British Quality Standard Mark not only gives shoppers the assurance that their meat is properly produced, it also guarantees that it is British – helping our farmers. Which is something that I whole-heartedly support."

2. *Young People Now* is the only weekly magazine for those who work with young people aged 11-25. See www.ypnmagazine.com.

LOAN SHARKS' LETHAL BITE 04 November 2004

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield is calling on the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to conduct an urgent examination of loan shark rates of interest.

Paul is one of an all party group of MPs who have today written to the OFT to express their concern at the lack of regulation of loan sharks and the extortionate rates of interest levied on some borrowers. **Paul said:**

"Many families across Britain are held in the lethal bite of a loan shark.

The Meadows' family case where the judge squashed the debt of £384,000 which had grown from a £5,750 loan, has highlighted the urgent need for an examination of loan shark rates of interest. This unregulated industry preys on people with sometimes devastating consequences. It is time for the OFT to bite back."

1. The following letter was sent to the Office of Fair Trading on 4 November 2004. It has been signed by MPs from all parties.

Mr John Vickers, Director -General, Office of Fair Trading,

03 November 2004

Dear Mr Vickers,

Loan shark regulation

We are members of Parliament who have concerns about the regulation of loan sharks and what a judge recently called the "extortionate" rates of interests levied on borrowers at this end of the market. You will be familiar with the Meadows' family case which was heard last Thursday and where the judge squashed the debt of £384,000 which had grown from a £5,750 loan taken out with London North Securities. We are aware of many other similar cases, which afflict constituents throughout the land.

We would ask first, that *the OFT examine loan shark rates of interest with urgency* and secondly request that a group of us *meet with you* to discuss these issues as soon as possible.

Many of us have signed an Early Day Motion in Parliament drawing attention to these issues and we will of course continue to raise these matters in Parliament and with the relevant departments.

We look forward to your reply.

Yours,

2. Early Day Motion 1845 has been signed by 76 MPs including Paul Holmes MP. The text of the EDM is as follows:

That this House welcomes the judgement in favour of the Meadows family in their case versus London North Securities; and urges the Government to bring forward legislation to prevent similar activities by loan sharks.

NORTH/SOUTH EARNINGS DIVIDE WIDENS AS LABOUR SITS IDLY BY 17th November 2004

Figures published today by the Liberal Democrats reveal that Labour has done nothing to tackle the North/South earnings divide since coming to power.

While poorly paid workers in the East Midlands have seen their average earnings increase by just £54.70 a week since 1998, Londoners have seen a huge £95 a week jump. The figures show that not only is Labour failing to reverse the regional disparities in wage levels, but the earnings gap has increased dramatically since they came to office.

Areas with the lowest increase

Areas with the highest increase

North East	£48.30 a week	London	£95 a week
West Midlands	£53 a week	South East	
	£74.80 a week	East	£62 a week
Wales	£54.10 a week		
East Midlands	£54.70 a week		

Paul Holmes MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, said: “The continued imbalance of earnings between regions will be to the detriment of Britain as a whole. Average wage measures offer a snap shot of life under this Government’s two speed economy. Workers in the East Midlands earn an average of over £155 less per week than Londoners. While the south of the country is booming, other regions are locked in economic stagnation. The Prime Minister’s claim that there is no north-south gap is completely undermined by these figures.”

Notes The table below gives figures on the median weekly earnings in real terms by region in each year since 1998. From this the real term increase in weekly earnings can be calculated (see final column).

£545.20 (median weekly earnings in London) - £390 (median weekly earnings in the East Midlands) = **£155.20 difference in median weekly earnings as at April 2004**

Median gross weekly earnings, full-time employees^(a)

£ per week, April 2004 prices^(b)

2002	April 2003	April 2004	% increase '98-'04	April 1998	April 1999	April 2000	April 2001	April
				£ increase '98-'04				
North East		324.9		332.3		346.5		347.1
	354.0	352.5		373.2	15	48.3		
North West		341.6		347.0		368.5		378.4
	398.7	17		57.1				
Yorkshire and the Humber		337.1		339.5		359.4		380.1
	393.5	17		56.4				

East Midlands	335.3	342.6	348.0	360.6	372.0	384.1
390.0	16	54.7				
West Midlands	344.3	349.1	358.7	372.3	376.4	382.5
397.3	15	53				
South West	338.3	342.7	353.5	366.5	374.7	386.5
394.8	17	56.5				
East	362.1	368.6	376.8	394.4	403.1	412.4
424.1	17	62				
London	450.2	458.2	484.0	499.2	514.5	527.6
545.2	21	95				
South East	376.4	381.8	397.0	414.4	431.2	440.0
451.2	20	74.8				
Wales	331.9	335.2	344.6	355.1	358.8	367.9
386.0	16	54.1				
Scotland	337.2	348.1	356.0	369.4	381.7	385.8
394.5	17	57.3				
Northern Ireland	320.3	328.6	336.9	343.8	351.2	356.2
17	54.8					375.1
United Kingdom	359.9	365.6	377.7	391.0	401.4	408.8
423.0	18	63.1				

Notes: (a) Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was not affected by absence.

(b) Converted to real terms using CPI.

Source: ONS, ASHE, Apr 1998-2004

LABOUR'S IRRATIONAL JOB CUTS LEAD STRAIGHT TO PICKET LINE

05 November 2004

Paul Holmes has met with Public and Commercial Services Union members on the picket line in Chesterfield.

Commenting on the strike action, Paul Holmes MP says:

“That Civil and Public Servants feel driven to strike action is a sign of how the Government have mishandled this issue. The 100,000 job cuts appear to be a round figure, plucked out of the air for election purposes, rather than being the rational consequence of analysing what is or is not needed in terms of civil service provision.

“The Government cannot even tell us yet exactly where the closures and job losses are to occur – yet they claim their policy is a rational one.

Fewer custom officers mean more smuggling of drugs and illegal weapons. Fewer inland revenue staff mean more tax cheats.

Fewer staff working on Pension Credit or Child Support Agency means an even bigger shambles than already in those areas.

Fewer Jobcentre Plus staff mean less help for jobseekers such as the disabled or the older unemployed.

Closing outlying jobcentres means a worse service to needy people.

“Labour should not be engaging in a silly bidding war with the Conservatives as to who can sack the most civil servants.”

PAUL BACKS BILL TO STOP EXPLOITATION OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED

15 November 2004

Liberal Democrat spokesperson on disability, Paul Holmes MP, will today back a bill to improve the protection of visually impaired consumers.

The Braille Identity Cards Bill, which will be introduced by Jon Trickett MP, would require all organisations that provide employees of members with identity cards to include Braille information on their cards. The Bill

follows increasing Parliamentary concern that some unscrupulous doorstep callers are exploiting and in some cases endangering the lives of vulnerable consumers, including those with visual impairments. So far the Bill has received the support of over 60 MPs and 20 organisations with an interest in consumer safety, including CORGI, the RNIB and the Jill Dando Institute for Crime Science.

Commenting on the Bill, Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield said: *“Adding Braille to ID cards is a cheap and easy step towards improving protection for Braille readers. I urge all organisations that provide ID cards to take this step and help protect a vulnerable group of consumers.”* **Speaking ahead of introducing the Braille Identity Cards Bill, Jon Trickett MP said:** *“This issue first came to my attention in my capacity as Chair of the All Party Gas Safety Group. CORGI, the Council for Registered Gas Installers, introduced Braille on the card they issue to around 44,000 registered gas installation businesses every year. It has worked for them and I believe that other organisations should follow this example. My Bill would also help set a precedent for Braille being included on all forms of ID in the future.”*

1. For further information about the Bill contact Victoria Fewkes on 07971 425219.
2. Paul Holmes MP's office can be contacted on 020 7219 8158.

Disability and Discrimination Bill at last

Paul Holmes, Liberal Democrat Disability Spokesman, welcomed the announcement in today's Queens speech that the Disability and Discrimination Bill was at last to be introduced, saying:

"This Bill is a welcome but overdue move to plug some of the glaring gaps in Disability legislation since 1995. The danger remains that, even after the extensive pre-legislative scrutiny that has already taken place, the Bill could be lost as a result of the General Election - widely expected for May 5th next year. Disability groups had expected this legislation to be introduced in 2001 or 2002 or 2003 and will not forgive the Government if yet more delays occur as a result of the Bill's late introduction to Parliament just before a likely election.

"It seems ironic therefore that the Government is rushing into legislation to create the controversial single Commission for Equality and Human Rights. There is a clear need for the complex and confused morass of different equality rights and laws to be simplified and unified BEFORE any attempt is made to create a single body to oversee all the different strands."

INSPIRING INVOLVEMENT: CHESTERFIELD MP SUPPORTS CAMPAIGN TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN GLOBAL ISSUES 24 November 2004

Paul Holmes MP for Chesterfield is supporting a youth-led charity's campaign to make young people aware of the impact of their lives on the developing world.

Development in Action is run entirely by young volunteers who aim to promote global citizenship by improving understanding of development issues and encouraging greater engagement in them among young people in the UK.

Yesterday Paul Holmes MP joined leading MPs and peers to celebrate Development in Action's 10th Anniversary at the Palace of Westminster. Paul said:

“In a day and age where competition for profit leaves little space for young people to explore and take responsibility for how our world works, it is remarkable that a charity run entirely by young people, should thrive on the energy of its own voluntary members. Since this unique charity was founded ten years ago, more than 160 young people have volunteered with Indian non-governmental organisations on placements organised by Development in Action. On their return to the UK these volunteers have produced a wealth of material and held scores of events to encourage interest in global issues in their local communities. Development in Action inspires young people to engage in the wider world at a time when awareness and understanding is of increasing importance.”

LIB DEMS – EAST MIDLANDS’ WORKERS DEALT DOUBLE WHAMMY

7 December 2004

Startling new figures published by the Liberal Democrats today show that workers in the East Midlands are being hit by both a growing North/South wage divide and a sharp increase in redundancies.

The latest statistics reveal that a massive 13,000 people were made redundant in the East Midlands between May and August 2004. This is an increase of almost 45% compared to the preceding quarter when 9,000 people were laid off. While poorly paid workers in the East Midlands have seen their average earnings increase by just £54.70 a week since 1998, Londoners have seen a huge £95 a week jump.

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

“While the Prime Minister boasts of a nation-wide record unemployment low, workers in the East Midlands are being dealt a double whammy.

“The East Midlands and the North East now top the bill as the regions with the highest redundancy rates in the UK.

“Labour has done nothing to tackle the North/South earnings divide since coming to power. Those who are in work earn an average of over £155 less per week than Londoners.

“While the south of the country is booming, other regions are locked in economic stagnation, and Labour sits idly by.”

These are the latest redundancy figures available, compiled from an answer to a written parliamentary question tabled by Paul Holmes MP, *30 Nov 2004, Column 98W*:

Redundancies: numbers (thousands)

3 months ending	East Midlands	Regional mean average	UK
May 2004	912,143		
August 2004	1,311,135		

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey

Redundancies: rates (per 1000 employees)

3 months ending	East Midlands	Regional mean average	UK
May 2004	5.15,5	5.9	
August 2004	7.4	5.5	5.6

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey

Regional redundancy rates ranked in order from highest to lowest:

	Region	Redundancy Rate (per 1000 employees)						
1	East Midlands	7.4	North East	7.4	South West	6.5	South East	6.1
	North West	5.8	London	5.7	Yorkshire and the Humber	5.6		
	West Midlands	5.1						
8	Eastern	5.0	Wales	3.8	Scotland	3.8	Northern Ireland	3.4

Source: ONS Labour Force Survey

For earnings figures see previous article

DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF COUNCIL TENANTS

08 December 2004

Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, today challenged the Prime Minister to:

Explain why he and his government have such a dogmatic, ideological prejudice against those who democratically vote to stay as council tenants

Defend the way ballot options are financially rigged by the Government against the option of staying with the council

Paul added: “Over and over again the Government has made it clear that money will not be made available to improve the Housing of those who remain with the council. Write-off of historic housing debt, grants and permission to borrow, is only for those who agree to be privatised. When the Prime Minister seeks to extend democracy to other countries by invading them it is ironic that he denies the democratic wish of those council tenants who vote to remain with the council.”

Notes:

The full text of Paul Holmes’ oral question to the Prime Minister is as follows:

“As the Prime Minister knows, by next summer all councils must have held compulsory ballots of their tenants on stock transfer. These ballot options are financially rigged by the Government against the option of staying with the council, rather than opting for a housing association or PFI landlord. Could the Prime Minister explain to my constituents in Chesterfield, a quarter of whom are council tenants, and to his own back benchers in this House, why he and his government have such a dogmatic, ideological, prejudice against those who democratically vote to stay as council tenants? “Why are council tenants denied the access to finance offered to those who opt for private landlords?””

HOLMES DEMANDS PENSION JUSTICE FOR CHESTERFIELD CONSTITUENTS 13 December 2004

At Question Time today Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield and Liberal Democrat Shadow Minister for Work, has yet again put pressure on the Government to try and achieve justice for his constituents who worked at Chesterfield Cylinders, Dema Glass and Coalite.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Alan Johnson MP, failed to answer Paul Holmes MP adequately when asked if he is prepared to see Chesterfield constituents suffer in their old age or if the Government will plug the devastating pension shortfall facing many in their retirement.

Paul Holmes MP has been raising this issue with Ministers since 2001 and has still not received a satisfactory answer:

“The Minister’s assertion to me that the £400 million promised by the Government in the Financial Assistance Scheme was sufficient, is little short of a disgrace. Everyone accepts that at most it would only ever provide one third of the money needed and probably far far less.”

MANUFACTURING JOBS: LOWEST SINCE RECORDS BEGAN - HOLMES 15 December 2004

The Liberal Democrats today attacked the Government for presiding over the worst ever decline in manufacturing.

Official figures out today show that manufacturing jobs have hit the lowest point since records began in 1978. Today’s figures from the Office for National Statistics show 3,245,000 manufacturing jobs in the UK – down from 6,912,000 in 1978. The figures also show that over 100,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in the last year alone.

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

“It is a sad indictment of this Government that they are presiding over the worst ever decline in manufacturing. Gordon Brown is twiddling his thumbs as manufacturing jobs go to the wall. Gordon Brown’s spin and gloss on its record on employment cannot hide the fact that the Government is turning a blind eye to the collapse of the manufacturing industry. More must be done to help the real economy of our towns and rural areas. Small scale factory closures can have a huge detrimental effect on the local community as the high-profile collapses that make news headlines.”