

Government information

If you wish to govern well you need access to good quality information about public services, budgets and outcomes. If you wish to do the job of holding government to account for its actions and inactions you need access to good quality information to come to fair judgements about how well government is performing and what needs improving.

It is currently difficult to get simple factual information from the civil service machine. I and others have not been given good factual answers when we have asked how much extra the NHS will spend, what it will spend it on, what its manpower budget is for the year ahead and how it will bring down the waiting lists. I have also been refused a factual answer to the simple question how many Chief Executives are there in the various structures of NHS England? I have also received no answer to the question how much the government is spending this year on hotel accommodation for illegal migrants pending processing of their cases.

The briefing from NHS England seems to say that in short term the waiting lists will go up as more people engage with the NHS after the intense period of the pandemic and discover they need treatments and procedures. They have declined to tell us how much extra work they can do for the promised extra money, or how much of the one off costs of Covid can now be spared and redirected.

The Treasury as custodian of the budgets should insist on more detailed plans and link these to reporting outcomes so that taxpayers see they are getting value for the extra cash being committed.