

Recent government announcements

I paused yesterday when I read the latest Ministerial announcements that were being out to the press, public and MPs.

The Home Secretary announces an additional £4m spending on anti slavery prospects. I am all in favour of the UK doing what it can to stop modern slavery. Good border controls into the UK would be an important part of achieving results. The strange thing about the announcement was the small sum involved, the lack of progress reports on what has been achieved with spending so far, and the absence of any measurable change he expects to come from the £4m being committed.

I always think it a bad idea for Ministers to put out that they are spending so much, or so much more, without saying what the money will buy, and how it compares with what is being spent up to that point. We were told in this latest announcement that the government has spent £200 m on anti slavery over an unspecified time period. What successes has that brought us in this important battle against criminal activity? Why will an extra £4m make a lot of difference? As one of the two projects is better care for victims in Nepal, what action is being taken to avoid future victims? The main issue is not so much the amount of money, but what the money buys and how successful our spending programmes are. Has the Home Secretary taken more action to prevent human trafficking into the UK? That would be an important contribution to ending modern world slavery.

The second announcement was even more curious. The government is spending £4m on new computer games. It will make cash available to help “the creators of Peaky Blinders and Wallace and Grommit” “develop new games based around their famous creations”. Why does it need government cash for such a commercial prospect? Is this a grant or gift, or does it buy taxpayers any equity in the project? Why on earth is the government involving itself in difficult commercial questions of which game will be better and more popular than other games?

Ministers should be more strategic, and should concentrate on spending money where only government can take the actions. When talking about spending they should be more interested in the output, the quality and efficiency of the spending, rather than just headlining the amounts being committed. In a £700 billion budget there are 175,000 £4m packages to talk about, too many for individual Ministerial attention.