



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Ms Jil Matheson
National Statistician
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

22 January 2014

Dear Ms Matheson,

Government Spending on Flood Defences

I should like your advice about the statistical validity of the figures about government spending on flood defences which I received in a number of recent answers from DEFRA. I enclose copies of each of the questions and answers.

On 15 July 2013 in a written answer I was given a table of figures on “DEFRA funding for flood defences” which I understood to show a reduction in expenditure from a peak of £646 million in 2010-11 to £533 million in the current year.

In the House on 9 January 2014 the DEFRA Secretary of State claimed (in relation to flood defences) that “the Government are spending more in this spending round than was spent by the previous Government” (Hansard, col. 430). Later that day I reminded the Secretary of State of his department’s answer on 15 July and asked him to clarify his earlier statement. He repeated that “..... this Government are providing more than any previous Government in the current spending review.”

I therefore tabled a further question, answered by the DEFRA Parliamentary Under-Secretary on 15 January 2014. This answer revised the figures given in the earlier answer, and sought to justify the Secretary of State’s claim in the House by arguing Government spending “together with external contributions” is rising.

I should be grateful for your advice on the following points:

1. Can you explain the reasons why the Department revised the figures given in July 2013? I see the earlier answer refers to “DEFRA funding for flood defences” while the second appears to relate to “flood and coastal erosion”. Is this the reason for the discrepancy? Would you comment please on the validity of each set of figures?

2. The more recent figures appear to include £148 million of external funding over the four year period 2011-15. Is this funding guaranteed; how much has been received and spent on flood defences to date; and is it accurate for DEFRA to describe external funding as "Government" spending, to use the Secretary of State's words in the House?

3. The Secretary of State clearly wishes to give the impression that funding for flood protection is increasing but it seems to me that this claim does not stand up if you compare current spending (even on his recently revised figures) of £577 million with the figures spent in the last full year of the previous Government (£633 million), or the first year of the current Government (£670 million). Nor does the claim stand up if you compare the actual spend in the first three years by the current Government with spending over the last three years of the previous Government. In which case, is it accurate for the Secretary of State to claim, in answer to my oral question on 9 January 2014, that "this Government are providing more than any previous Government"? The use of the word "are" relates to the present, of course, not the future.

4. I asked a statistician in the House of Commons Library to read the most recent written answer and offer advice. I enclose this. You will see that he concludes that "Department spending on flood defences in 2011-15 will be lower than it was in 2007-11 in both nominal and real terms." Do you agree with this conclusion?

I should also be grateful for advice about how it would be possible to ensure that Government answers involving figures are both objective and accurate. Are there guidelines, or a code of practice, which Ministers and civil servants are supposed to follow, and if so have they been followed rigorously in this case?

Yours sincerely,



Hugh Bayley MP

LD

House of Commons

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 July 2013

Flood Control

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department has spent on flood protection measures in (a) England, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) the City of York council area in each year since 1995-96. [163867]

Richard Benyon: The following table shows spending by DEFRA on flood protection in England since 1996.

	<i>Total (£ million)</i>
1996-97	102
1997-98	87
1998-99	78
1999-2000	76
2000-01	72
2001-02	85
2002-03	128
2003-04	136
2004-05	415
2005-06	515
2006-07	505
2007-08	457
2008-09	566
2009-10	620
2010-11	646
2011-12	548
2012-13	523
2013-14	533

The following table shows the total expenditure of the Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee and specifically on the City of York. Prior to 2004-05 grants were provided through a system of central Government grants to individual local authorities.

<i>£000</i>			
		<i>City of York</i>	
	<i>Yorkshire Regional Flood Defence Committee⁽¹⁾</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Revenue</i>
2000-01	28,578	0	⁽²⁾ 582
2001-02	30,715	0	⁽²⁾ 675
2002-03	41,548	56	⁽²⁾ 768
2003-04	37,330	130	780
2004-05	33,421	0	750
2005-06	40,684	120	830
2006-07	34,015	110	650
2007-08	35,174	24	663
2008-09	41,791	56	676
2009-10	57,704	53	641
2010-11	48,645	132	342
2011-12	42,376	194	192
2012-13	39,413	747	224

⁽¹⁾ Total spend for Yorkshire and north bank of Humber (including York).⁽²⁾ Prior to 2003 figures are based on the management area in which York is based, the Ouse.

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Oral Answers to Questions

Thursday 9 January 2014

Hugh Bayley (York Central) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State clarify his earlier statement about an increase in his Department's funding for flood protection? During the second half of last year, the hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who was then a DEFRA Minister, told me in a written parliamentary answer that in the year in which his party came to power, the Department spent £646 million. Spending in the current year is £113 million less, at £533 million. Did the Secretary of State's earlier statement mean that the Government have now increased funding for flood protection in this and future years, and does that mean that he can now abandon the proposals to cut 1,700 jobs at the Environment Agency?

Mr Paterson: I know that those in the Labour Whips Office struggle with slow learners, but I shall put it on the record again: this Government are providing more than any previous Government in the current spending review. We are spending £2.3 billion, which is in addition to £148 million of partnership money. Exceptionally, the present Government have a £2.3 billion programme of capital spending up to 2021. Will Labour Members please ask those on their Front Bench to endorse that spending programme?

DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

Named Day

Date: 15 January 2013

Hugh Bayley (York Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 15 July 2013, Official Report, columns 478-9W, on flood control, and his oral Answer to the hon. Member for York Central of 9 January 2014, for what reasons the earlier answer shows that his Department's spending on flood protection in England fell from £646 million in 2010-11 to £533 million in 2013-14 when his oral Answer on his Department's spending on flood protection states that he is providing more money for this purpose than any previous Government in the current spending review; how the £2.3 billion figure in his oral Answer relates to the £646 million and £533 million figures in the answer of 15 July 2013; how the figure of £2.3 billion was calculated; over what period the £2.3 billion will be spent; and what the evidential basis is for the statement that the current Government is providing more than any previous Government on flood protection. [182589]

Dan Rogerson

Holding Reply sent 14 January

Together with external contributions under this Government's Partnership Funding approach, more is being spent on flood and coastal erosion risk management during the current Spending Review period (2011/12 to 2014/15) than in the previous four years (2007/08 to 2010/11).

The supporting information for this calculation is set out below.

I would also like to take this opportunity to correct the record. Floods funding is complex, with a number of different income streams including Government funding, local levies, and other contributions towards schemes. Further analysis has identified some minor inconsistencies in the figures previously provided on historic Government spending on flood risk management, including in the Written Answer referred to by the Hon. Member. I regret that this was not presented in a consistent way, something I have now rectified.

Government expenditure on flood risk management

The figures below set out Defra expenditure on flood risk management, including through grant-in-aid provided to the Environment Agency for this purpose. They exclude funding through local levies or other income.

Year	Total (£m)
2007/08	500
2008/09	568
2009/10	633
2010/11	670
2011/12	573
2012/13	576

Future budgets for flood and coastal erosion risk management

The figures below set out current budgets, calculated on the same basis.

Year	Total (£m)
2013/14	577
2014/15	615

Expenditure on flood and coastal erosion risk management during the four-year period from 2007/08 to 2010/11 totalled £2.371 billion. Expenditure already incurred, and planned, during the current Spending Review period (2011/12 to 2014/15) totals £2.341 billion.

Funding from external sources spent during the four-year period from 2007/08 to 2010/11 totalled £13m. For the current Spending Review period, funding from external contributions under our new Partnership Funding approach are expected to total up to £148m.

Taken together, more is therefore being spent on flood risk management than ever before.