

WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

Week ending Friday 12 December

Air Quality Report published

The Environmental Audit Committee has published its report 'Action on Air Quality' on Monday 8 December. Against a background of evidence on the health impacts of air pollution and failure to meet EU air quality standards, the Committee decided to examine the current situation, three years after its last report. The Committee's report calls on government to take action to comply with legal limits on air pollution. The committee's recommendations include:

- Calls for a National Framework of LEZ to be urgently set up
- Examine fiscal measures to gradually encourage a move away from diesel vehicles;
- Consider introducing a diesel scrappage scheme
- Launch an independent public inquiry to look at the required action on air pollution
- Apply pressure at European level to ensure effective EU legislation

(Source: Environmental Audit Committee)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmenvaud/212/212.pdf>

£25 million funding for advanced biofuels

On 10 December a £25 million 'Advanced Biofuels Demonstration Competition' to build advanced biofuel plants was launched. The Department for Transport funding will be supported by private sector investment and will enable the construction of up to three demonstration biofuel plants. The fuel produced by the chosen technology must show a minimum of 60% greenhouse gas emissions reductions compared with fossil fuels. The £25 million funding will be made available over three years. The competition expects plants backed by this funding to be operational by December 2018 and produce at least 1 million litres of biofuel a year. Alongside the Competition, the Department for Transport has also established a Transport Energy Taskforce to consider options for supporting advanced biofuels through policy mechanisms. (Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/25-million-funding-for-green-transport-fuel-plants>

Ed Miliband delivers key economic speech

Labour leader Ed Miliband set out his economic plans promising a "tough but balanced" approach to cutting the £90bn deficit in a keynote speech on Thursday December 11. He pledged reductions in public spending and outlined pledges Labour has made so far. These include:

- Scrapping the winter fuel allowance for "the wealthiest pensioners"
- Capping child benefit rises at 1%
- Scrapping police commissioners
- Selling off "unwanted government assets"

He also said Labour would make savings of £500m in local government. This would include merging some of England's 46 fire authorities and scrapping the New Homes Bonus. (Source: BBC)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-30417955>



Motoring services strategy: VCA competition result

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, Claire Perry, published a Written Statement on Monday 8 December concerning the Motoring Services Strategy. A competition to find a commercial partner to grow the work of the Vehicle Certification Agency has not been successful. In a written statement to the House on 15 August 2013, the then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, Stephen Hammond MP, announced that the Department of Transport would undertake market engagement and a procurement competition to find a

commercial partner to form a joint venture to grow the work of the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA). Clair Perry informed the House that the competition has not been successful in identifying a suitable joint venture that would achieve the objectives of both partners.

The VCA will continue to provide vehicle testing and certification services. The department will consult with a range of stakeholders before considering alternative proposals. (Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/motoring-services-strategy-vca-competition>

National College for Advanced Manufacturing

On Thursday 11 December, Business Secretary Vince Cable announced a new wave of employer-led National Colleges to help the UK develop world-class skills in the advanced manufacturing, digital, wind energy and creative industries. The four colleges will cater for some 10,000 students by 2020, enabling young people to gain professional qualifications up to postgraduate level. Up to £80 million of capital funding will be matched by employers over 2015-16 and 2016-17 – a potential total investment of £160 million by 2017. In one of the four cases, government will work with the High Value Manufacturing Catapult and the EEF, the manufacturer's organisation, to establish a National College with major facilities at the AMRC in the Sheffield region and the MTC in Coventry. The Catapult leads innovation in manufacturing and ensures training equips learners for the future economy. The National College will be established as a network of hubs that will identify and work with the best established providers nationwide. (Source: BIS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cable-new-generation-of-national-colleges-will-lead-revolution-in-hi-tech-skills>

New careers and enterprise company for schools

Secretary of State for Education Nicky Morgan made a statement to Parliament on Wednesday 10 December announcing a new careers and enterprise company for schools. The new company, to be chaired by Christine Hodgson, chair of Capgemini UK, should support greater engagement between employers, schools, and colleges, ensuring young people get the inspiration and guidance they might need to leave the education system ready to succeed in working life. Nicky Morgan confirmed that government would support the new company with

start-up funding in 2015-16, the cost of which should be met from the £20m announced during the Autumn Statement. (Source: Department for Education)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-careers-and-enterprise-company-for-schools>

Consultations on removing exemptions for HGVs

On Thursday 11 December, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, Claire Perry MP, announced the publication of two consultations that will close on 5 March 2015.:

- HGV periodic testing and inspections exemptions
 - Goods vehicle operator licensing exemptions
- As certain heavier vehicles have been exempt from operator licensing and or road worthiness testing, some of the exemptions have been proposed for removal or modification in order to comply with EU legislation. The HGV testing scheme provides exemption for 37 classes of vehicle and government is proposing to remove or modify exemptions covering 10 categories of vehicles. The proposed measures are expected to improve road safety, update the legislation and ensure a more uniform approach for operators. (Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/consultations-on-operator-licensing-and-annual-roadworthiness-testing>

Week ahead

Commons Chambers

Thursday 18 December

- 9:30am: Energy and Climate Change questions (topical at 10:15am)

Commons Committee

Monday 15 December

- Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (3:00pm) - Government support for business
- Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (5:15pm) - The future of devolution after the referendum

Tuesday 16 December

- Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (9:30am) - Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership TTIP

Wednesday 18 December

- Treasury Committee (2:45pm, Wilson Room) Autumn Statement