

Deloitte/Ipsos MORI Delivery Index

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The latest Deloitte/ Ipsos MORI Delivery Index provides little Christmas cheer for the Government at the end of 2005. Although voters have becoming slightly more optimistic about the economy, they are still negative overall about the long term prospects for the economy and public services, and expectations of the NHS are now at their lowest level since 2002. The results are released today (Wednesday) at the Ipsos MORI End of Year Event 2005: Is Britain Going to the Dogs?

Two in five (41%) think that the Government's policies will improve the state of Britain's economy in the long-term, while 44% disagree (the proportion who are critical is down from 50% in September). Fewer - one in three (35%) - think the Government's policies will be good for public services, back to the levels seen a year ago before the brief post-election honeymoon.

Most worryingly for the Government, expectations for the NHS are now at their lowest level ever recorded by the Delivery Index since it started in March 2002. A quarter (25%) think that the NHS will get better over the next few years, compared with 41% who think it will get worse, up four points since September. Supporters of all political parties are becoming more concerned - Labour supporters as well as Conservatives and Lib Dems.

The trend in attitudes towards the environment is also in a long-term decline. Over two in five (44%) think that the quality of the environment will get worse over the next few years, up from 36% three years ago.

However, the picture is slightly more positive when looking at the other major public services, where attitudes have stabilised. Voters are steadily positive about education, which 36% expect to get better, compared with 25% who think it will get worse. Views on public transport and policing are evenly split. Twenty-nine per cent expect public transport to get better (up three points since September), while the exact same proportion think it will get worse. Considering policing, 26% think it will get better, while 25% think it will get worse.

Ben Page, Chair of the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, said, "The public has settled back into a sceptical attitude about most public services. The Government will be most concerned about why - unlike other major public services - expectations for the NHS continue to fall. This is likely to reflect media coverage of the NHS funding crisis - financing of the NHS is a key public concern. The pace of change is also an issue - staff in the NHS are concerned about the impact of the latest reforms, and they have a major impact on what the public think."

Mike Turley, head of public sector at Deloitte, said: "The findings of today's Index are consistent with previous results - that the public has divergent views on the provision of NHS and education services, despite the fact that both have been subject to similar financial investment and government intervention and policy. The reasons for this are not clear, and warrant further analysis. It may be nothing more than a reaction to headlines or entrenched perceptions - but if this trend continues the government may need to reconsider how its agencies deliver public services."