

Taking out the trash: how spin doctors wrangle the news

As Christmas recess begins, government departments and quangos release 424 publications. We reveal the best bad news

The final day the Commons sits before a Christmas or summer recess is always a busy day for political journalists, thanks to the large number of government announcements made at those times. On Thursday there were 36 written statements from ministers and, according to the gov.uk website, [departments put out 424 publications](#).

There were two important announcements, on local government spending and [Lords reform](#), accompanied by oral statements to the Commons. And the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, an important quango, published its annual report, among plenty of other reports and documents.

At Westminster this is known as burying bad news or, after the same practice featured in an episode of West Wing, "Taking Out the Trash Day".

Government spin doctors know that if they release a vast amount of potentially embarrassing news on the same day they will limit negative publicity. In an ideal world the No 10 communications chief would also arrange for someone like [José Mourinho to get sacked](#), but there are limits to the powers of Craig Oliver and so it's best to put that one down to luck.

Some of the information released on Thursday came under the heading of "transparency" and Matthew Hancock, the Cabinet Office minister, said in a statement that "enhancing transparency and accountability continues to be at the heart of our approach to government".

That is hard to square with an approach to news management that seems intended to minimise scrutiny. The prime minister's spokesman claimed the government was having to put out so much news on the one day because it had "a big agenda".

Announcements are made on the day before recess because many ministerial declarations have to be made to parliament. Many of the items released on Thursday are genuinely awkward or embarrassing for ministers. But others are more innocuous, and they may have been held back not as part of a cover-up but simply through inertia and Whitehall's ingrained reluctance to release information.

We have not read all 424 documents, but here are 30 of the announcements that have appeared, which the government seem to want you to overlook.

- 1 - [A local government spending settlement involving cuts worth billions](#)
- 2 - [A report from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission saying Britain is on track to becoming ever more divided](#)
- 3 - [A long-delayed report into the Muslim Brotherhood whose conclusions may disappoint allies such as Saudi Arabia](#)
- 4 - [The list of government special advisers, and figures showing how much they are paid](#)
- 5- [The list of ministerial interests](#)
- 6 - [Information about David Cameron's ministerial gifts, hospitality, travel and meetings](#)
- 7 - [A list of receptions held at Downing Street](#)
- 8 - [A list of government officials earning more than £150,000](#)
- 9 - [A report from the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration saying the authorities have lost contact with around 10,000 asylum seekers](#)
- 10 - [A plan to curb the powers of the House of Lords](#) that has been criticised [by opposition parties and by constitutional reformers](#)
- 11 - [Cuts to solar panel subsidies](#)
- 12 - [Homelessness figures showing a 45% rise in the number of families living in emergency B&Bs](#)
- 13 - An official Department for Work and Pensions report on the bedroom tax saying [that three-quarters of those affected have cut back on food](#) and that [the impact on downsizing has been limited](#)
- 14 - [A Home Office review saying the government should abandon its policy of having tied visas for overseas domestic workers](#)
- 15 - [An air quality action plan that has been criticised as too lax by environmental campaigners](#)
- 16 - [A report into failings at the Southern Health NHS foundation trust](#)
- 17 - [A range of court fee increases](#)
- 18 - [A statement saying 177 service personnel are embedded with other nations' armed forces](#)
- 19 - [Police funding figures for 2016-17](#)
- 20 - [Charts setting out how much money is spent on ministerial cars](#)

- 21 - [Suspension of a badger vaccination programme](#)
- 22 - [The allocation of onshore gas and oil exploration licences that would pave the way for fracking](#)
- 23 - [An evaluation of a pilot scheme relating to the use of independent child trafficking advocates](#)
- 24 - [Data about the number of quangos funded by the government](#)
- 25 - [The government's response to the Harris review on self-inflicted deaths in custody](#)
- 26 - [A report on the needs of ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system](#)
- 27 - [The government's sports strategy](#)
- 28 - [A long-term walking and cycling investment strategy](#)
- 29 - [A consultation on reform of the Independent Police Complaints Commission](#)
- 30 - [A list of guests who have visited Chequers](#)