

Dear Postbag,

Labour Parliamentary candidate Sarah McCarthy-Fry who chaired the committee that agreed the Portsmouth incinerator deal shows an astonishing amount of naivety. She said: "When we put the incinerator out to tender, we asked for a simple box to compare prices and agreed to help pay for improvements to its look and environmental quality." That agreement to pay for improvements was completely open-ended and now the council is facing a £3m bill this year instead of the £1m invoice it expected. This was a basic error in contractual arrangements.

I hope the civil servants negotiating the £1bn contract for a private company to build and run the QA "super-hospital" do make any mistakes, but I think they will be hard-pressed to foresee every circumstance that may arise over the 30-year life of the contract and to insert the necessary clauses into the agreement. If they don't manage to perfect the art of crystal ball gazing, taxpayers could again be facing unexpected bills.

The NHS is looking at £500m of debt for 2004-05, yet it has allowed the country's first Private Finance Initiative hospital in Dartford to make £37m profit, profit that should be in the NHS and being used to treat patients. The Lib-Dems are getting behind Private Finance Initiatives and a Green vote is needed to reverse this trend.

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