

Choosing a candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner

On Saturday evening I attended with other Conservatives one of three party meetings to select our candidate for the Thames Valley Police Authority PCC elections.

The role of Police and Crime Commissioner has on the whole failed to capture the public imagination, with low turnouts in past elections for the role. This is a pity, as the job should be an important one. I myself was no enthusiast for this particular constitutional change, when Mrs May decided we needed to move on from Councillor Police committees to a directly elected head, but now we have them it is important to try to make them work well.

The PCC is the man or woman who appoints the Chief Constable and who works with the Chief Constable on budgets and strategic direction of the police force. The PCC does not interfere in day to day policing or operational matters. It is not the PCC's job to direct the police to pursue this criminal rather than that one or to prosecute X and not Y. The PCC does not have the training and powers of a police officer to investigate and arrest suspects. It is the PCC's job to understand what the public wants and expects of its police service, and to set priorities, targets and direction for the police in discussion with the Chief Constable. The PCC is both there to lobby MPs and Ministers for the extra money their Chief Constable wants, and to help the Chief Constable establish priorities and create more efficient ways of doing things in the light of the budgets available.

The selection meeting was a good opportunity to review current policing and to send some messages about what the public priorities are. I pointed out that the public say they want more targeted action on drugs, gangs, street violence and illegal settlements in particular. The candidates also wanted to discuss cyber crime and social media hate speech. Some others wanted to talk about police numbers and the utility of beat policing. I look forward to seeing the Manifesto of the winning candidate in due course

The whipping for this week

I have been sent a whip for this week which tells me I have to be present in Parliament until 10.30pm on Monday, to 7.30pm on Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday and 6pm on Thursday – all three line whips. I was planning to be there anyway. Attendance at Questions, non Bill committees and other meetings at other times of day are not whipped.

The whip does not tell me how they wish me to vote on any of those days, nor

what the government motions might be. Indeed, Wednesday's business is down as a general debate on housing where no vote is likely, and Thursday is down as a general debate on NICE and rare diseases, again where a vote would be unlikely.

If as I hear on the media Wednesday turns out to be a motion over exit from the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, I expect a three line whip to tell me to vote to keep so called No deal on the table. If Thursday turns out to be a motion over delay, I expect a 3 line whip to tell me to vote against delay, in accordance with the PM's often stated policy that we will leave on 29 March with or without a deal. I assume there will be a three line whip for me to vote for the Withdrawal Agreement on Tuesday, which I will be unable to accept. The Manifesto we stood on as Conservatives said very clearly they would negotiate the Future Partnership at the same time as the Withdrawal Agreement. They should have kept their word. Signing a Withdrawal Agreement making many concessions to the EU without signing a Partnership at the same time would be crazy. We would be paying far more than the advertised £39bn for nothing.

The government wants Leave voting MPs to fear that Parliament will take control and stop Brexit if we do not vote for the Withdrawal Agreement. There is no need for that to happen if we reject the Withdrawal Agreement. The government will have to offer leadership if that happens, by explaining why we must not take no deal off the table, and why delay brings nothing but more uncertainty and trouble. The government can stop Parliament voting to change the law if it wishes. It now has to assert itself and say it will battle to ensure we leave on 29 March with or without the Withdrawal Agreement as promised.

That is why I have set out what the whipping should be for this week in the absence of any clarity from Mrs May.

[Tuesday's vote](#)

The choice before us is No Brexit with a Withdrawal Agreement , or Brexit without a Withdrawal Agreement.

The Withdrawal Agreement is a very expensive lock up of the UK in the EU in never ending talks, having thrown away our negotiating cards and our veto and votes.

"Simples" as the Prime Minister now says.

Fighting fewer wars is a good idea

I am a supporter of the UK having good defence forces to act as a deterrent to any foreign power that threatens our home islands or our overseas territories. I also wish us to have expeditionary capability to intervene overseas where our membership of the UN or NATO requires us to help in a common cause, or where our own territories are at risk.

I do not wish us to intervene in every Middle Eastern conflict, in the way Mr Blair and Mr Cameron wished to do. There is little evidence that some of our interventions had long term beneficial impacts, despite the brave and often successful short term military achievements. It needed political follow through, successful diplomacy and nation building, which often proved too difficult for a western country to help bring about.

Both the USA and the UK have been more circumspect about intervening in Syria. In the UK Parliament restrained the government, and in the USA the election of Mr Trump brought a more sceptical approach to Middle Eastern conflicts to office. The long and disastrous Syrian war has continued without Western ground troops. Had the West committed ground forces it is difficult to see it would have been any less devastating or bitter, with the added complications of tensions between Russia and NATO and possible adverse reactions from many Syrians against what would have been portrayed as a Western invasion force.

When we as a country put our troops in harms way it is most important they are given a feasible task and a cause to be proud of. In Syria there was neither on offer. All out war against ISIS would help Assad, an evil dictator. Trying to topple Assad would have helped ISIS, an evil terrorist group. UK policy was in danger of veering between two unpleasant sides, or sought the largely non existent third way force that could arise and beat both sides, whilst upholding western values .

Sometimes the West has to see there are limits to what force can achieve in places rent by civil war and religious and ethnic strife. In the end these conflicts need more talking and more politics. Assads victory will create a poisoned legacy and leave many displaced and unwelcome refugees, whilst prolonging the war would kill and render homeless yet more people.

Votes next week

Another Groundhog week looms, when Remain MPs who cannot accept the verdict of the Peoples Vote have another go at derailing Brexit.

We know that the first vote will be a reprise of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Unless there is a great breakthrough in negotiations with the EU this weekend with the removal of the backstop provision, the government is likely to find plenty of rebels against its three line whip and the proposal will be defeated once again.

The government has not yet offered Conservative MPs guidance on how to vote should there be subsequent votes next week about keeping no deal on the table, and a possible delay to exit. Maybe they hope that by creating uncertainty about their intentions they will maximise pressure to vote for the Agreement. I do not see this working.

The government should whip its MPs to vote against taking no deal off the table. As the Prime Minister has regularly explained, you can only take no deal away by agreeing a deal. As others have explained, the right to leave without signing an Agreement is the main pressure point we have on the EU to try to get a better agreement.

The government should also whip its MPs to oppose any attempt to delay Brexit. The Prime Minister has told us all many times that we are leaving the EU on 29 March. She also told us at the election and for many months thereafter that no deal is better than a bad deal, showing she was prepared to leave without a deal if necessary.

Some think the government could lose both of these votes. Both are clearly winnable if the government puts the effort in. There are Labour MPs who would be very reluctant to vote for a delay given the strength of feeling in their constituencies pro Leave, and given the promises Labour made in their Manifesto to back Brexit. It would be perverse if Parliament voted for delay given the pledges made by most MPs in the election, and given the support of the government with their DUP allies. It would place Parliament at loggerheads with the 17.4 m majority in the referendum and leave many MPs trying to explain why they had switched from their position to get elected that they supported leaving. If they now said that they wanted to delay it probably with a view to second referendum or to delay for a long time in the hope that people would change their minds, they would need to agree delay with the EU and change our legislation.

Were Parliament to vote against no deal and against the Agreement it would have voted a contradiction. In that circumstance the government should proceed to exit in accordance with the legislation Parliament has already passed. The legislation takes precedence over a subsequent motion.

If a group of MPs try to legislate for delay they will find it difficult. It would need the government to back them to give a serious chance of success. The issue would be enforceable without government agreement. Parliament could legislate to say it must not rain tomorrow, but it would have no meaning and would be unenforceable. Delay requires the agreement of the EU as well as of the UK government. If the UK government is against delay they could claim they could not negotiate one sensibly. The only way to ensure delay would be to bring the government down and replace it with one that does want delay. The courts are unlikely to uphold a case against Ministers over such a political issue which can only be resolved by

Parliament.