

Probate fees – a successful consultation

The government issued a Statutory Instrument to increase fees for probate considerably, based on the value of the estate being wound up. There were many objections to these proposals including my submission on behalf of constituents. The government has listened to these concerns. The Lord Chancellor has now written to me to say he has “decided to withdraw the previous proposals”.

He now intends to review the whole question of court fees including probate, in the light of the strong feelings that the probate increases were far too large.

The Royal Berkshire Hospital to receive two new CT scanners

As a result of new Government funding to upgrade cancer detection technology The Royal Berkshire Hospital will receive two new CT scanners with advanced capabilities. This is most welcome news for patients and their families as early diagnosis is vital to saving lives.



Department
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New NHS Capital Funding – Imaging equipment

Yesterday I formally announced that 78 trusts will benefit from a multi-million pound funding injection to upgrade cancer testing and detection technology. This includes:

- CT and MRI scanners, bringing in alternatives with lower radiation levels
- Breast screening imaging and assessment equipment

This money comes from the £200 million of funding the Prime Minister announced last month to improve screening and early diagnosis of cancer. It is part of the Government's commitment to ensure 55,000 more people survive cancer each year.

Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust is one of the trusts funded for the new scanners. It is all part of our Long Term Plan to ensure the NHS is always there for everyone.

Replacing and upgrading machines will improve efficiency as they are easier to use, they scan and construct images quicker, and reduce the need to re-scan. This will improve patient experience and will lead to earlier diagnosis, which is vital to saving lives.

This new equipment also brings new capability, with all machines AI enabled so the NHS is ready for the challenges of the future.

This is all part of our recent commitments to upgrade NHS facilities, and tackle the most urgent infrastructure projects and the largest hospital building programme in a generation, which will deliver at least 40 new hospitals over the next decade.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK

Government consults on new police powers over unauthorised encampments

The Home Secretary is consulting on giving the police new powers “to arrest and seize the property and vehicles of trespassers who set up unauthorised caravan sites”. The idea is to have something similar in our law to that used in the Republic of Ireland.

The Home Secretary said “The public want their communities protected and for the police to crack down on trespassers. Our proposals aim to ensure encampments can be challenged and removed as quickly as possible”

Speaker election

As this Parliament struggles its way to a premature close making a further mockery of the Fixed Term Parliaments Act it has decided on one last decision to carry its waning power into the next Parliament. It has decided to persevere with the election of a new Speaker on Monday. Whilst the new Parliament could choose a different Speaker on its first day, this would be unlikely.

The election campaigns of the candidates have not been front page news. On many issues the candidates agree. They all want the role to be less flamboyant, more referee and less player. They all say they wish to raise standards of behaviour and to show respect for MPs and the institution.

To me the crucial question is how will they wish to redefine the balance in Parliament between allowing strong and telling criticism and investigation of government whilst at the same time allowing a government to govern,

Some reforms of recent years are good and should be kept. More frequent Urgent Questions and topical debates keep Parliament relevant and make governments answer when things are worrying or going wrong. Too many Urgent Questions that are not urgent, have been asked before or are not of wider interest can absorb too much time for no great purpose.

Question Times have been extended informally. The new Speaker should review with interested parties how long Questions should normally last and make arrangements accordingly. Making the PM or Ministers stay long after the appointed time is discourteous to people with busy diaries.

Opening up the House for better public access, and allowing use of Speakers

House for charities and other civic institutions has been welcome. The Parliament buildings belong to us all and should serve the wider community.

The more recent constitutional experimentation should stop. Legislation should be proposed by a government, with a Money resolution to show it fits into the budget and Queens consent where needed to show it is compatible with the way the government is using prerogative powers. Parliament rightly has plenty of powers to delay or make difficult the passage of an unwelcome government Bill. It should not create powers to speed through legislation the government opposes on a one day only temporary alliance of MPs against the government.

The next Speaker also needs to come to a view with the Commons on what remedial and improvement works need doing over the next decade to the fabric of the buildings.

Wokingham Tesco fuel

Some time ago I raised with Tesco management the issue of sometimes blocked access to one of the four fuel pumps they put into the car park of the Wokingham store.

I am pleased they did put in a new route which gives fair access to all four pumps with an orderly queue which has improved the facility.