

Good Friday Churches Together in Wokingham

I attended the coffee morning at St Paul's Church today and enjoyed seeing the displays and tasks for the children around the Biblical account of the death of Christ. I joined those walking into town and attended the ecumenical service in the Methodist Church with 48 others from the range of Wokingham Christian Churches. I am grateful to those who organised these events under the banner of Churches Together and invited me to attend.

During the morning three told me they dislike the Conservative party and our current leader intensely and wish to see him and the party out of office. The immediate complaints related to the breaches of rules over covid in Downing Street but there were clearly wider and long standing disagreements. Local Conservatives accept the Prime Minister's apology and do not wish to see a leadership election now given the need for clear leadership over Ukraine and the cost of living issues.

Two lobbied me against the plans for a new approach to try to stop the trade in dangerous small boat journeys across the Channel. My email box is more balanced on this issue with some writing in wanting the new approach or questioning whether it will be sufficient to end the people trafficking, as well as some sending in a campaign email against the proposals.

Le Pen and Macron battle for different futures of the EU

I do not interfere in elections in foreign countries. I do not express preferences between candidates. I am interested in the debates they hold and in the possible outcomes.

On current polling Macron will narrowly defeat Le Pen on Sunday week. The contest is much closer than many thought a few weeks ago and looks certain to be much closer than in 2017 when they last fought each other for the Presidency. Macron entered the contest late using the advantages of incumbency to dominate the political news by acting as President and concentrating on Ukraine, the main news of the moment. Le Pen campaigned around the country on cost of living issues and narrowed the gap with Macron. Now Macron the candidate is shifting position on a number of domestic issues and campaigning intensely. The one big debate between them could be important and swing votes.

Macron wants a more integrated EU with a strong foreign policy and a beefed up military force to back its approach to world affairs. He sees an

opportunity to increase French leadership at a time of German weakness following a shift to a new and difficult three party coalition and problems from depending too much on Russian gas. He will claim Le Pen's proposals to ease financial pressures on people are unaffordable.

Le Pen wishes to stay in the EU and Euro but wants at best a semi detached relationship with the supranational body. She sees Hungary and Poland as potential allies for a renegotiation to take back more powers for national determination. She also wishes to cut French financial contributions. She would not welcome the more integrated and more powerful EU Macron seeks.

Le Pen offers a major cut in VAT on fuel and other measures to ease the squeeze.

Whichever wins they will prove France is fairly evenly split between two wildly different views of the EU. It will be interesting to see how much ground Macron changes on domestic economic issues at a time of severe income squeeze.

Controlling the borders

The Home Secretary has been trying to get legislation through Parliament. She has made clear that the government wishes to stop the cruel and exploitative trade in bringing people illegally across the Channel risking their lives. The lawyers and courts have made it difficult for the government to enforce the law against illegal migrants, so the Home Secretary is trying to toughen it in a way which will make it more difficult for them to thwart the policy aim. Border Force apparently need even clearer instructions in legislation to stop this trade.

We need further developments. The Home Secretary recognises the current situation should not continue. It is wrong to allow a lot of people to get here by illegal means and then to keep them here at great expense unable to work. It would be much better if economic migrants applied before they came and only came if they get permission to come.

Your thoughts on how Ministers can get the system to deliver would be interesting.

What estimate has the Health Secretary

made of total NHS redundancy payments for the last year?

I suspect the true answer to my question is considerably higher than the answer they provided. I wonder why they left some categories out when I asked for the total?

The Department of Health and Social Care has provided the following answer to your written parliamentary question (146530):

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what estimate he has made of total NHS redundancy payments for the last year. (146530)

Tabled on: 24 March 2022

Answer:

Edward Argar:

The total value of the redundancy payments incurred by National Health Service in 2020/21 is £27.4 million.

The following table shows these costs by voluntary and compulsory redundancies in 2020/21 by the NHS England group and Consolidated Provider Account group. The NHS England group comprises of clinical commissioning groups and NHS England. The Consolidated Provider Accounts group includes NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts.

Entity	Voluntary redundancies including early retirement contractual costs £ million	Value of compulsory redundancies £ million
NHS England group	2.5	6.1
Consolidated Provider Account group	2.8	16.0

Notes:

These values do not include mutually agreed resignations contractual costs, early retirements in the efficiency of the service contractual costs and contractual payments in lieu of notice. Exit payments following employment tribunals or court orders and non-contractual payments requiring HM Treasury approval.

The answer was submitted on 11 Apr 2022 at 10:40.

The Chancellor should show he understands the cost of living crisis

The big rise in energy prices is like a big tax rise. It takes a lot of money out of peoples purses and wallets. It reduces discretionary spending as many people cut back to meet the higher bills for the basics. It ushers in stagflation as the economy slows and inflation stays high.

The last thing we need when energy- and now food – prices soar are tax rises as well. That compounds the squeeze and slows the economy more. Last month the U.K. economy after a year of fast growth slowed to just 0.1% whilst inflation rose again. Today we should expect a further rise in prices.

The Chancellor should announce now that he will remove the NI rise and take VAT off fuel. Of course he also needs to bring the deficit down. That requires growing revenues. Producing more of our own oil and gas will give revenue a big boost as there is a double corporation tax rate on that activity. Easing the squeeze will mean more VAT on non energy purchases as there will be more of them, and more Income tax.

It also requires better control over public spending. Maybe we could start by cancelling overseas aid to countries supporting Russia, and charge all the Ukraine spending to the overseas aid budget as a better substitute.