

The BBC takes free tv licences away from older pensioners

The BBC pocketed the higher licence fee but has now gone back of the idea that they should finance the free tv licences for the over 75s.

Should the government now decriminalise payment of the licence fee? Should it review BBC funding and spending to see why the BBC cannot afford to meet its obligations to pensioners?

Parliament makes a sensible decision at last on Brexit

Yesterday the combined forces of the Opposition parties united to try to hijack the business of the House in the future to delay or prevent our exit and to ban a so called No deal exit. By 309 votes to 298 votes this proposal was defeated. They wanted time to legislate to stop Brexit or to prevent the government counting the clock down to our exit on 31 October without allowing the Parliament yet another say on the Brexit options.

It is traditional for governments to control the business of the House. If a majority builds up in the House against what they are doing then the opposition forces have the right to table and vote on a motion of No confidence. If the Opposition wins that motion it ends the government's tenure. The Opposition is not afforded the right to have Parliamentary time to have its own alternative programme of new legislation or its own alternative foreign policy . As it does not enjoy a majority there would be no point in allowing this. It enjoys plenty of time to question, criticise, debate and comment on the government's approach which is its role. The Opposition is free to table any amendments it likes to government legislation, and free to try to persuade government MPs to join them in amending or opposing it.

The last time the Opposition tried a hijack to secure legislation it was to ask the government to seek a delay to our exit. As it happened Mrs May wanted to seek a delay anyway, so when the vote was won by just one vote it did not change anything as the government wanted to ask for a later exit date. As they found when trying to legislate then, all Parliament could try to do was to bind the hand of the UK government. They could not legislate to require a delay because that also required to consent of the EU.

It is good news that this time Parliament recoiled from allowing those MPs most hostile to our exit from the EU to take control of the Order paper. If

they did so they would undermine the UK's negotiating position further, humiliate our country again internationally, and thwart the clear wishes of the British people by refusing to implement the Brexit we voted for.

Thanks to the IEA for a good event last night

The IEA had 100 acceptances for a full house last night to discuss my book "We don't believe you". (The book is available on Amazon) The questions went on for almost two hours. We discussed everything from the collapse of traditional political parties to Brexit, from the Trump phenomenon to austerity economics, from the middle Eastern wars to the distrust in the media. I will draw on parts of the discussion in blogs to come.

Don't forget the middle

Labour claims to stand up for the poor, the dispossessed, the unemployed and the unfortunate. The Conservatives seek to show that many Labour policies would in practice damage them, as they would damage the economy as they memorably did in 1975-9, and in 2007-9. Fewer jobs, less growth and more unemployment as they produced do not cut poverty. Conservatives have sought to show that they too want to help those most in need, promoting work whilst supporting welfare. In government Conservatives have pursued higher minimum wages, less tax on those on lowest incomes and a range of other measures. In the leadership election there are furious bids by various candidates to set out what more can be done for the poorest in our community.

Amidst all this politics someone needs to stand up for the many who are not on higher incomes but who earn enough to get little or no benefit help and who have to pay substantial tax bills. Mrs May seemed to understand this in her early comments as PM about the "just managing", though there was a danger this language was a bit patronising and downbeat. What we need is a vision of how the many who work to provide for themselves and their families can aspire to higher incomes and better lifestyles feeling the government is on their side rather than seeing them as an audience to tax and regulate in pursuit of wider social goals.

I want the next government to take the taxes off aspiration. Why do we face such high taxes on buying a better home or on moving to a different location? Why do we have to pay such large taxes if we want to buy a new or better car?

Why does the government charge VAT on various home improvements? Why does the government want to reduce the number of people working for themselves by claiming they are not truly self employed for tax reasons?

There are limited ways out of low income and no assets. To do it people usually have to buy a home of their own and spend time and money on improvement. The range of tv programmes about moving and home improvement point to the interest in this opportunity. People do need to keep a decent proportion of their work income, to reach the point where they can afford to save. Building your own business is one route to a better lifestyle with assets in your business. It should be feasible for the average person, not needing super human skills to run the gauntlet of regulatory compliance and tax challenge.

I would like the next government to make it easier for people with aspirations to achieve their aims, and for more of the freedoms and lifestyles of the better off to be available for the many. Instead of government seeking to regulate our conduct more and tax success wherever it finds it as if it were a problem, I want a government that rewards those who want to do more for themselves and their families, and who given the chance will do the right thing.

[Wokingham Post Office](#)

I have received this letter from the Minister regarding the move of Wokingham Post Office. I will be taking up her offer of a further meeting.



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Rt Hon Sir John Redwood MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

[O June 2019

Dear Sir John,

Thank you for coming to see me on 7 May to discuss the franchising of the Wokingham post office, and for presenting me with the results of your petition showing the level of local concern about post office services in your constituency. I appreciate your ongoing interest in post office branches and the impact that they have on your constituents. As Minister for Postal Services, I am keen to ensure that Post Office Limited is providing the best possible service for citizens and responding to their concerns, while operating in a commercially sustainable way.

As I know you understand, while the Post Office is publicly owned, it is a commercial business. The Government sets the strategic direction for the Post Office – to maintain a national network accessible to all and to do so more sustainably for the taxpayer – and allows the company the commercial freedom to deliver this strategy as an independent business.

As we discussed, franchising is not a privatisation or closure programme. Post Office Limited's proposals to franchise or host its Crown branches are part of its plans to ensure a sustainable network in the face of unprecedented change on our high streets and in consumer trends. Franchising has helped the Post Office's Crown branches move from a £46 million loss in 2012 to break even today, thereby reducing the taxpayer funding that the Post Office requires from Government whilst maintaining, and in some instances improving, customer service levels. With over 11,300 branches (almost 98% of the total network) operating successfully on a franchise or agency basis, franchising is a tried and tested way of delivering key services.

Since we met, I have requested and received more information from Post Office Limited on the specific circumstances in Wokingham, as I was keen to understand how the issues that you and your constituents have raised would be addressed. I have also met with Tim Parker, Chairman of the Board of Post Office Limited, and Alisdair Cameron, Interim CEO of Post Office Limited, and raised your concerns with them. I also shared with them the results of your petition.

One of the specific concerns that you raised was about the level of service provision at the new site. You noted that there are sometimes long queues at the current Post Office branch. As you are aware, the new WHSmith branch will have three counter serving positions and two further self-service kiosks. I have asked Post Office Limited how they decided that this is the right level of provision. They have explained that they use a data

modelling system to establish the number of counters required. This system uses data from transaction logs and assumes that existing custom will transfer to the new site. The system is able to model usage down to 15-minute slots and it is on this basis that Post Office Limited are confident that the planned level of provision is appropriate for the level of service required in Wokingham.

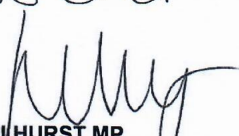
Post Office Limited have also explained that queues at the current Wokingham branch are primarily due to the handling of undelivered mail collections for Royal Mail through one of the counter positions at the current site. That service will not be transferring to the new Post Office and so queueing should be notably reduced. The new branch will also be open an additional 15 hours a week, including all day on Saturday and for four hours on Sunday.

You raised a concern about accessibility for customers with wheelchairs or push chairs. Post Office Limited have assured me that as part of the conditions of appointment, WHSmith are required to maintain one aisle as the designated walkway to the post office. This will be marked by directional signage and the aisle will be wider (1500mm) and will be kept clear of obstructions.

Finally, we discussed how the franchised branch would handle increased footfall in future, as you noted that you expect the population of Wokingham to increase. Post Office Limited have clarified that the franchising plans for Wokingham are based on present customer habits and needs. However, as part of their broader approach to the network, Post Office Limited continually monitor demand and changing requirements in particular locations, taking steps to address these through network growth and other changes as required.

Let me assure you that Post Office Limited is committed to ensuring all branches across its network offer excellent customer service and has a strong history of working with its many franchise partners and agents to achieve this. Overall customer satisfaction levels with Post Offices across the network are good, with levels of satisfaction in relation to service performance and waiting times both consistently very high. Furthermore, a 2017 report by Citizens' Advice indicated that franchised branches are performing in line with or better than traditional branches on service quality and accessibility. Post Office Limited ensures that their franchising partners are experienced retailers who share the common desire to deliver a high level of customer service.

I hope that this letter provides you with some reassurance that you can take back to your constituents that the post office services available to them will be appropriate following franchising, and that Post Office Limited have given due consideration to the concerns that have been raised in this particular case. I am also pleased to note that in my meeting with Tim and Alisdair, they offered to arrange a further meeting for you with senior Post Office Limited officials if it would be helpful to discuss this further. They will be in touch with you separately to arrange this.

yours ever


KELLY TOLHURST MP
Minister for Small Business, Consumers & Corporate Responsibility

P.S happy to discuss further..