

The King's speech

I hear the government is seeking good ideas for next year's legislative programme. I will be setting out in a few blogs what a Conservative King's Speech could look like. I urge the government to find things to do which will deliver more prosperity, freedom and happiness. They need to remember it is 5 million Conservative voters that the polls say they have put off in the latest surveys who they need to win back for the general election.

Let's start with the Foreign and Home offices.

1. Stop all overseas aid to any country with a nuclear weapons programme or with a defence budget greater than 2.5% of GDP. We should not be grant aiding rearmament by the back door.
2. Allocate more of the Overseas Aid budget to meet first year set up costs of asylum seekers and economic migrants.
3. Renegotiate the Windsor Agreement so that the more important Good Friday Agreement can be restored, with Unionists returning to Stormont.
4. Tell the EU that if they put a tariff on our cars exported to the EU for insufficient local content we will place one on their exports of cars to us.
5. Strengthen the small boats legislation by adding a notwithstanding clause to exclude further legal challenges
- 6 Intensify actions to arrest and prosecute people smugglers.
- 7 Return more foreign prisoners to their own countries.
8. Decriminalise non payment of tv licence fee
9. Raise income thresholds for economic migrants

Wokingham Council to think again about bins

I am glad to see the Lib Dem Council accepts it was wrong to remove public bins without consulting residents and putting it to the Council. They should now reinstate the full services to keep Wokingham clean and tidy. They need to listen to Council taxpayers views and spend the money on the public's priorities. Instead they behave undemocratically and impose their priorities, wasting money .

My Intervention in the Health and Social Care Workforce General Debate

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

I am alarmed, as my hon. Friend is, about the 9.1% annual loss of staff, which is a high loss rate by any standard and implies that something is wrong with the jobs or leadership. Do he and the Committee think that a lot more work needs to be done on job descriptions, job feasibility and support for people in their roles so that these jobs are perceived to be of greater value by people and they do not want to leave? Otherwise, we have the extra costs of training somebody new.

Steve Brine, Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee:

Yes. There is a part of the workforce plan, which the Select Committee discussed a little yesterday, which talks about how, every year, every member of staff should have a conversation with their employers about their pension arrangements and mental health and wellbeing. That is fantastic. I am sceptical as to how it is remotely possible in an organisation of this size. That does not mean that I do not think the ambition is right—I think that it is right—but it would be helpful to the House if the Minister touched on that in her wind-up.

The other point I make to my right hon. Friend, which I will also make later in my speech, is that we must remember that there are NHS employers, and ultimately the Government are the employer in the widest possible sense, but the direct employer when it comes to hospitals is the trusts, and they have a big role to play in retention and in workforce health and wellbeing. We sometimes duck away from saying that, but I say that here in the House as well as privately to the chief executive of my trust.

I am encouraged by the emphasis that the workforce plan places on prevention, which everybody knows is one of my great passions in life and politics. That will clearly be crucial, given the supply and demand challenges facing the health service at the moment. Prevention is, as colleagues know, a subject dear and close to the work of the Select Committee: we have launched a major inquiry into the prevention of ill health, with 10 workstreams. We have already done the vaccination workstream and have moved on to the healthy places—home and work—workstream. Details of that are available on the Health and Social Care Committee's website.

Let me turn to some of the specifics in the Committee's report and what action the Government have taken. One of our key recommendations was that

“the number of medical school places in the UK should be increased by 5,000 from around 9,500 per year to 14,500.”

The plan does that: it doubles medical school training places in England to

15,000 by 2031-32, which is extremely welcome.

Wokingham Council is annoying residents

I am getting complaints about the increases in parking charges, the extension of parking charge hours and the failure to mend potholes quickly. The Council seems to be out to fleece the motorists, make it more difficult to take a car into the town centre and make it more difficult for all those who need their car to get to work, to take children to school, to get to the shops. I have put these points to our Conservative Councillors who are trying to get change of policy from the Council. Residents deserve better.

The costs of illegal migration

On Monday the government sought to restore some sense to the legislation against illegal migration. It is difficult to comprehend the Lords who watered down the Bill to make illegal migration easier, and who argued that 600,000 legal and illegal migrants coming a year was not enough. They had no working suggestions on how we could house more, or where the extra school places, surgery appointments, roadspace, electricity and other essential services would be provided. If we invite people into our country we should want them to have a decent life here. That requires making proper provision for where they live and how they access services. We read about Bishops complaining that we are not helping enough migrants without offering up places in their own palaces and extensive Church properties for accommodation. Where do they suggest we house the additional illegals coming in?

Before covid the EU suggested a cost of Euro 250,000 was an estimate of how much additional capital needs to be provided for a new arrival so they have a home and all the services that go with that. If we upgrade that modestly for inflation to just £250,000 today to cover the capital costs, that means a single day of 600 illegal migrants requires the state to apply £150m of capital to provide for them assuming they stay as many do. People on the current housing waiting lists are concerned if recent arrivals get priority. Many towns and cities are worried at the extensive take over of hotels for migrants, removing their services for local businesses, for weddings and events and for tourism.

The Prime Minister boldly promised to stop the small boats. This summer they are still coming. He is right to reverse unhelpful amendments from the Lords, and must be ready to do more if there are further attempts to prevent the UK saying No to illegals who are not asylum seekers fleeing persecution.