

# More GPs and more appointments for patients

I have been lobbying for more GPs and better access for people needing appointments. The last Health Secretary announced money for more doctors, but retaining some of the Doctors we already have is also proving difficult.

I welcome today's announcement from the current Health Secretary that some of the extra money available for the NHS will go on training more young people to be doctors, and on recruiting more GPs to make it easier for surgeries to provide timely appointments for all needing them. I have been following up about the local situation on GP numbers and services.

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## What is affordable?

I was disappointed to hear on the radio that it was a sign of the times and surprising that I was supporting the fiscal changes made by the government. The BBC saw me as some kind of austerity hawk who had suddenly changed, showing the public the BBC think they have every right to comment on my views without bothering to read or understand them.

As readers of this blog will know I campaigned for Prosperity not austerity as the driver of policy before the last election as well as for this one. I see recent changes as good progress in the direction I have wanted campaigning for more money for local schools and the NHS and for a boost to our economy from lower taxes.

Indeed my opposition to the austerity framework of policy goes right back to my resignation from the government of John Major. I resigned over the Maastricht Treaty and possible membership of the Euro. As I made clear at the time I saw the Maastricht controls on the economy as likely to induce a bust. They had done so in the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and could do so again if we joined the currency. We did not join the Euro but we have always accepted the Maastricht debt and deficit controls, with unfortunate economic consequences. In the Hammond years they have overtightened our economy, cutting its growth rate.

The new fiscal framework is a bit looser but officials wedded to the 3% deficit ceiling and the 60% state debt to GDP target have ensured there are surrogates. Allowing 3% of GDP borrowing for capital spending with a balanced current budget is a bit looser than an overall 3% budget deficit ceiling with pressure to run a deficit considerably lower than 3% much of the time. The need to reduce state debt as a percentage of GDP is not entirely dropped but it now relates to a whole Parliament lifetime and not to each individual

year, and only bites if debt interest exceeds 6% of tax revenue. This allows flexibility to take a bit more advantage of low interest rates,.

Because the BBC will never explain the origins of our current controls they do not wish to expose this kind of detail. It means they misrepresent the views of those of us who wish our country to be prudent but do not wish our economy to be short changed when inflation is under control and growth is weak.

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## Wokingham Conservatives

Tonight Wokingham Conservatives will confirm the local campaign with me as their candidate for the General election. I will talk to the members present at the meeting about the messages I would like their help to take to the doorsteps and onto social media over the next month. They will be based on the things I have set out in recent blogs and will include a local agenda for the next five years.

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## Room for tax cuts

The new fiscal framework set out yesterday by the Chancellor should allow scope for some tax cuts in the next budget. It is important these are not crowded out by further increases in spending. Tax cuts are the quickest way to boost real incomes and stimulate the economy. People should be able to spend more of their own income.

As the world economic slowdown continues, led by a world manufacturing recession, it is important the UK has an economic stimulus. The US is growing faster thanks to past big tax cuts, spending increases and recent interest rate cuts. Yesterday the Bank of England once again continued their squeeze, refusing to join the ECB, Fed, and the Central banks of China, Australia, Brazil and all the others that are cutting rates to provide an economic boost.

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# The NHS

The important principle that people like and support is that healthcare should be free. We should all have free access to the NHS, and should expect to receive timely and good quality treatment in proportion to our health needs.

The only major departure from this was when Labour in the early years of the NHS introduced charges for prescriptions and glasses. Subsequent governments of various parties have given more exemptions to prescription charges whilst continuing with them and from time to time increasing them.

The NHS has never been a fully nationalised service. Labour's original establishment allowed GPs to be private contractors, running their services from private premises as many still do today. The NHS has always relied on the private sector to supply its drugs, bandages, food and other supplies. For many years under governments of all three parties the NHS has employed private company contractors in various locations to clean and cook, to provide a range of services to hospitals and surgeries.

Nor has the NHS ever insisted on all its supplies coming from the UK. Where foreign companies have developed good drugs that UK manufacturers do not have the NHS is willing to import them. The NHS is also cost conscious and usually negotiates a bulk discount or special terms reflecting its buying power.

Most people do not mind the NHS drawing on the best supplies from the private sector as part of its activity, as long as the core proposition of free good quality NHS care is maintained. The present government has no intention of deviating from this. These are common principles and practices shared by Labour and Conservative governments in office.