

UK grows faster in January

The UK economy grew faster in January, and is now growing faster than the Euro area, France, Germany and Italy. Thanks to Brexit!

The latest annual figures for the main advanced economies shows tax cutting USA way out ahead with 3.1% growth in 2018, the UK at 1.3%, France at 0.9%, Germany at 0.6% and Japan at 0.3%. Italy has spent the last half year in recession.

The interpretative statements

If these new texts change something, then why isn't that reflected in a changed text for the Withdrawal Agreement?

I have not had a reply to my letter to the Attorney General about the other aspects of the Agreement which concern me, and received no good answer when I raised these points last night following the government Statement. Parliament should be shown the legal advice on EU determination of the payments under the Agreement, the role of the ECJ in disputes and the capability of the EU to legislate against UK interests throughout the negotiation period or so called transition.

Choosing a candidate for Police and Crime Commissioner

On Saturday evening I attended with other Conservatives one of three party meetings to select our candidate for the Thames Valley Police Authority PCC elections.

The role of Police and Crime Commissioner has on the whole failed to capture the public imagination, with low turnouts in past elections for the role. This is a pity, as the job should be an important one. I myself was no enthusiast for this particular constitutional change, when Mrs May decided we needed to move on from Councillor Police committees to a directly elected head, but now we have them it is important to try to make them work well.

The PCC is the man or woman who appoints the Chief Constable and who works with the Chief Constable on budgets and strategic direction of the police

force. The PCC does not interfere in day to day policing or operational matters. It is not the PCC's job to direct the police to pursue this criminal rather than that one or to prosecute X and not Y. The PCC does not have the training and powers of a police officer to investigate and arrest suspects. It is the PCC's job to understand what the public wants and expects of its police service, and to set priorities, targets and direction for the police in discussion with the Chief Constable. The PCC is both there to lobby MPs and Ministers for the extra money their Chief Constable wants, and to help the Chief Constable establish priorities and create more efficient ways of doing things in the light of the budgets available.

The selection meeting was a good opportunity to review current policing and to send some messages about what the public priorities are. I pointed out that the public say they want more targeted action on drugs, gangs, street violence and illegal settlements in particular. The candidates also wanted to discuss cyber crime and social media hate speech. Some others wanted to talk about police numbers and the utility of beat policing. I look forward to seeing the Manifesto of the winning candidate in due course

[The whipping for this week](#)

I have been sent a whip for this week which tells me I have to be present in Parliament until 10.30pm on Monday, to 7.30pm on Tuesday, 7.30pm on Wednesday and 6pm on Thursday – all three line whips. I was planning to be there anyway. Attendance at Questions, non Bill committees and other meetings at other times of day are not whipped.

The whip does not tell me how they wish me to vote on any of those days, nor what the government motions might be. Indeed, Wednesday's business is down as a general debate on housing where no vote is likely, and Thursday is down as a general debate on NICE and rare diseases, again where a vote would be unlikely.

If as I hear on the media Wednesday turns out to be a motion over exit from the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement, I expect a three line whip to tell me to vote to keep so called No deal on the table. If Thursday turns out to be a motion over delay, I expect a 3 line whip to tell me to vote against delay, in accordance with the PM's often stated policy that we will leave on 29 March with or without a deal. I assume there will be a three line whip for me to vote for the Withdrawal Agreement on Tuesday, which I will be unable to accept. The Manifesto we stood on as Conservatives said very clearly they would negotiate the Future Partnership at the same time as the Withdrawal Agreement. They should have kept their word. Signing a Withdrawal Agreement making many concessions to the EU without signing a Partnership at the same time would be crazy. We would be paying far more than the advertised £39bn for nothing.

The government wants Leave voting MPs to fear that Parliament will take control and stop Brexit if we do not vote for the Withdrawal Agreement. There is no need for that to happen if we reject the Withdrawal Agreement. The government will have to offer leadership if that happens, by explaining why we must not take no deal off the table, and why delay brings nothing but more uncertainty and trouble. The government can stop Parliament voting to change the law if it wishes. It now has to assert itself and say it will battle to ensure we leave on 29 March with or without the Withdrawal Agreement as promised.

That is why I have set out what the whipping should be for this week in the absence of any clarity from Mrs May.

Tuesday's vote

The choice before us is No Brexit with a Withdrawal Agreement , or Brexit without a Withdrawal Agreement.

The Withdrawal Agreement is a very expensive lock up of the UK in the EU in never ending talks, having thrown away our negotiating cards and our veto and votes.

“Simples” as the Prime Minister now says.