

A better Wokingham

On Friday evening Wokingham Conservatives held a thank you party for the volunteers who helped with the General election.

After I had paid tribute to those who went out in all weathers to deliver leaflets and talk to voters I reminded them of the four point plan for Wokingham I set out in my main election address. I suggested to the Councillors present that we draw on that when determining the local Manifesto for the Council elections this coming May.

Where improved and safer junctions and highways, better school buildings, more police and a wider range of social care requires more money I will continue to press for government increases. We are now seeing some of this extra money coming through, so I look forward to working with Councillors to see we get value for the extra money with visible improvements in local services and facilities.

The “job” of an MP

With the arrival of many new MPs at Westminster this week for their first year in office I will write a few pieces about the role of an MP, inviting your comments on what you want us to do.

Being an MP is not just a “job”. It is a way of life. My first advice to new colleagues is you are an MP 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Your time “working” may be closer to the standard 40 hour week of a “full time” employee, but for all 168 hours of the week you are an MP.

You are on call all the time in case some disaster strikes your constituency or our country. The constituency cases and emails come in at week-ends as well as during the week and sometimes need urgent replies.

You may be sitting at home listening to the news, but that may trigger some need to intervene following a news item. You may be in the local shops, but may then see something which needs following up for the sake of constituents.

I have included the 56 hours you are asleep or relaxing in bed though you would be wise not to take your MP work to bed with you. I do so because if you spend time in the wrong bed or share a bed with an inappropriate person you would soon find out that the media and public thought your bedtime a matter of public concern and debate.

Let us suppose you manage to carry out your duties in Parliament and answering emails, and dealing with constituency queries and cases in say

40-50 hours a week on average, you will have to accept that some weeks your working hours will be much longer. My second piece of advice is do not fight the need to be in Parliament when it is sitting and debating and voting on important matters. Surely that is what you have struggled to be able to do. Some MPs no sooner get elected than they are nagging the whips to allow them free time when Parliament is debating and deciding important issues. This leaves them tense and the party feeling a bit let down by them as the whips agonise over which request they can allow. There are days when we sit beyond 10pm and need to be there for a variety of good reasons. You also cannot do constituency correspondence on an iPad whilst taking a serious interest in a debate or Question time. If you are in the chamber it needs your attention.

Parliament meets to hold votes and make decisions about matters of interest to most people around 100 days a year. If those days coincide with a wedding anniversary, an important family birthday or a social event you just want to do you are likely to be disappointed. Explain in advance to friends and family that there are times when Parliament must come first. It is always possible to make up for that unfortunate truth by having a bigger and better celebration at the next available Friday or week-end when Parliament will not be wanting you in the evening or at all. Other Parliamentary days totalling around 70 offer debates which you may or may not wish to join, without votes you have to attend, so they offer more flexibility. For around 17 weeks a year or 85 week days Parliament is in recess, and there are 104 weekend days off. This allows considerable flexibility on how to organise events outside Westminster, meet the need to do things in the constituency and have time for yourself and your family. It is always a good idea to book out family time for non Parliamentary days well in advance and to stick to it in most cases.

Helping Australia

Many of us are distraught at the scenes nightly on tv from the Australian fires. I have contacted the government to ask if we are offering assistance.

We should not just assume because Australia is a relatively high income country she does not need help. Faced with the scale of these events she may appreciate additional ships and planes equipped for dealing with emergencies. We often help other countries facing natural disasters through our overseas aid department so we have some of the equipment needed.

Taking on a first employee

Since 2000 the UK has had quite a good rate of new business formation, in excess of the death rate for businesses save during the 2009-10 slump. London has led the way, with 1544 businesses per 10,000 residents, with Scotland and Northern Ireland at the bottom end of the table with 739 and 834 businesses per 10,000 respectively. Over the last 19 years the UK has added 2.4 m new businesses.

The bulk of these businesses are self employed people. Out of 5.9 million businesses, 4.5 million have no employees. 1.1 million businesses with employees have fewer than 9. Just 8000 businesses employ more than 250 people. The regions that have the highest number of businesses per 10,000 people also tend to be the ones with the highest incomes.

We need to ask what would it take to encourage more self employed people to take on their first employee? It does mark a large step up, with the employer having to accept a wide range of risks and responsibilities. We both need to create decent conditions for employment, and sensible conditions for employers so they find it worthwhile to take people on.

I would be interested in your thoughts on whether there are changes to be made to current rules to provide incentives to employers to create new jobs without damaging employee rights.

The continuing bias of the Today programme?

To show how unbiased they wish to be the Today programme had an item dealing with criticisms that they are biased. The item failed to grasp why so many of us think there is bias in much of what they do. They are so keen to run anti Brexit material that they come across as an institution with a strong view more than independent journalists trying to tease out the different beliefs and views of the audience they serve. They do not seem to know all the positives that led us to vote for Brexit. They also repeat daily the same climate change issue with a series of repetitious stories to the exclusion of other major problems and preoccupations of listeners.

Their one sided approach is reflected in their use of so called experts. These people usually share a similar economic, political and scientific world view. The bias of the experts is never explored. They are not usually asked about their past failures in predicting and forecasting and never asked who they vote for or which philosophy or other influences most weigh with them. Most accept, for example, that Brexit will cause economic damage. They

are inclined to say leaving without a deal is "falling off a cliff" or is "disastrous". They may tell us trade will be disrupted or even imply it may in many cases be badly damaged if we dare to leave under WTO terms. The economists if they are old enough would likely have recommended the Exchange Rate Mechanism which gave us a nasty recession, and would have supported the Bank of England's actions which helped bring the commercial banks down in 2007-9.

They rarely interview people who believe that Brexit is a good economic opportunity which can make us better off. They never wish to remember that some of us correctly predicted the ERM disaster and warned against the chosen Bank and government action in 2007-9. They will not explore the role of the Maastricht criteria in recent austerity economics. Their few interviews with possible Bank of England Governor candidates in the run up to the selection of the new Governor were pathetic, with no attempt to understand the many mistakes the Bank has made in recent years or to ask candidates how they might improve or change it.

When I have been invited on it is usually to fill some special political slot for a Eurosceptic, rather than to have a sensible interview on the state of the economy and the policy options facing a country soon to be independent. I am treated to the usual barrage of Remain questions which become as repetitious as most of them are silly to provide "balance". Yet the many more numerous Remain interviewees are usually spared having to answer all the questions I would wish to ask them about their past false forecasts and their present misunderstandings of what is happening in our economy whilst still fully in the EU.

I guess the journalists cannot accept that Brexit is a great idea of the people who just ask that the Establishment does their job. We want government to show how the freedoms and the extra money can be used to improve lives and our country's standing and prosperity which is why the Conservatives have just won a majority. The Leave voter listeners who are still tuning in just want to know why the BBC seems to have such a down on the abilities and prospects for our country outside the EU. They should know the case that says we will be better off with Brexit and give it equal prominence to the negative Remain forecasts.