



Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update

Friday 10th March 2017



Commons News

Spring Budget Statement

On Wednesday the Chancellor delivered his Budget to the House of Commons.

The Budget was an opportunity for the Chancellor to spell out a change of direction on policy in order to address the problems in the economy. Sadly there was nothing to deal with the living standards crisis, to solve the state of emergency in our NHS and social care system, or to build a fair economy for all.

Growth has been revised down in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and average earnings have been revised down next year and every remaining year of the Parliament. As we know, the target of balancing the books by 2015 was missed, and by the end of this Parliament it is forecast that the Government will be borrowing £21.4 billion.

I am concerned that this economic failure will mean people in our area will suffer with a squeeze to their living standards and the undermining of the public services we all rely on.

On social care, the announcement of an extra £2 billion does not make up for the fact that £4.6 billion was cut from social care in the last Parliament. I agree with the King's Fund health charity, which says we need at least a £2 billion injection now to stabilise social care rather than £2 billion spread over three years.

I oppose the plans to increase National Insurance for self-employed workers announced in the Budget. The main National Insurance contribution rate will increase from its current level of 9% to 10% in April 2018, and then to 11% in April 2019. I do not believe it is fair to introduce a £2 billion tax for low and middle earners whilst the Government is cutting Corporation Tax.

The measures that were announced in the Budget offer little hope of improving the economy or helping local families and I am concerned that they will mean we are less prepared for the challenges we face outside of the EU.

Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill

On Monday the House of Commons considered the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill.

The Bill aims to modernise the transport system and includes new insurance rules for self-driving cars and measures to improve provision of electric vehicle charge points.

Ultra-low emission and autonomous vehicles are expected to play an important role in our country's transport in the years to come and have the potential to provide economic, environmental and safety benefits.

Resolving the issue of how automated vehicles can be insured is essential if they are to become a feature on our roads.

I therefore support the Bill's intention to ensure that vehicle insurance policies facilitate that in the future.

However, I believe that the insurance system for automated vehicles should be reviewed regularly, and would like to see a review date included in the Bill.

Housing Benefits (18 to 21 year-olds)

On Tuesday the Shadow Housing Secretary asked the Government to make a statement on the impact of its plans to remove automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds on homelessness.

This followed the publication last Friday of the legislation which will bring this cut into effect on 1 April. The cut will affect young people claiming housing benefit aged between 18 and 21 apart from those who qualify for an exemption.

Charities have criticised the policy, with Centrepoin estimating that 9,000 young people will be put at risk of homelessness. I am concerned that in our area and across the country there will be young people who will be unable to rent somewhere to stay as a result.

I have deeply held concerns about the rising level of homelessness in our country. Since 2010, the number of people sleeping rough on the country's streets has more than doubled and the number of households accepted by local councils as homeless has risen by almost a half.

Children and Social Work Bill

On Tuesday the House of Commons considered the Children and Social Work Bill which impacts the provision of children's services, and the responsibilities that local authorities owe children in care. It includes the creation of a new social work regulator.

Social workers are at the forefront of helping children, families and disabled and older adults who are distressed, in difficulty and perhaps in danger. Most of their work goes unseen, without recognition, and they deserve our thanks for the major contribution that they make every single day.

I supported a cross-party amendment to the Bill which sought to force the Government to take up offers from local councils to accept more unaccompanied children fleeing conflicts.

Since the Government announced that the Dubs scheme would be closed, local councils across the country have said that they can do more. The amendment was about consulting local councils on their capacity. I was disappointed that this amendment was not added to the Bill.

Sky/21st Century Fox Proposed Merger

Formal notification of the proposed merger of Sky and 21st Century Fox was lodged with the European Commission on Friday 3 March and on Monday the Culture Secretary made a statement.

I share many of the concerns about the proposed deal that have been expressed both inside and outside of Parliament.

The Secretary of State said that she was minded to intervene on media plurality grounds.

The bid would put an even greater amount of UK media power in the hands of the Murdoch empire and I believe Ofcom should look at the whole group of Murdoch-owned and controlled companies in assessing whether the Sky takeover would threaten media plurality.

The Culture Secretary stated on Monday that she had not taken a final decision on intervention at this stage and will aim to come to a final decision on whether to intervene in the merger within 10 working days of the notification.

I believe it is clearly in the public interest that the bid is referred to the regulator on media plurality and broadcasting grounds.

Next Week

Monday: Lords Amendments Article 50
Budget debate.

Tuesday: Budget Debate.

Wednesday: National Citizens Service Bill

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