



**Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update**

**Friday 24th November 2017**



# Commons News

## The Autumn Budget

On Wednesday, the Chancellor presented his Autumn Budget to the House of Commons.

The Chancellor set out measures that he said would support more housebuilding and help aspiring homeowners; establish the UK as a world leader in new technologies; promote the skills necessary for the modern economy; and provide more support for households in the short term.

He also announced an additional £3 billion to prepare for Brexit, an expansion of the National Productivity Investment Fund and £6.3 billion of new funding for the NHS.

However, the real test of the Budget will be how it affects ordinary people's lives. I am concerned that the reality will be that a lot of people are no better off. Pay is now lower than it was in 2010 and wages are falling again. Economic growth, productivity growth, business investment, people's wages and living standards have all been revised down.

The deficit, which was supposed to have been eradicated by 2015, is now set to be eliminated in 2025. The Government is missing its major targets, yet the damage inflicted by its policies remains.

I also believe the Chancellor has failed to recognise the scale of the emergency in our public services.

The Budget provided no meaningful funding for our schools, which are still facing the first real-terms funding cuts since the mid-90s. It also failed to deliver anything approaching the support needed to address the crisis in our NHS or local government.

In addition, the Chancellor announced no measures to directly increase housebuilding – without that, lifting stamp duty for some will only drive up prices and benefit sellers.

Ultimately, I believe this is a “nothing has changed” Budget that fails to reflect the reality of people's lives or offer any plan to improve them.

## Housing and NHS

The House of Commons continued to consider the Autumn Budget on Thursday, with a debate focused on housing and public services.

On housing, the Government's proposed solution for the crisis is inept and counterproductive. The stamp duty cut for first-time buyers will not bring forward the new homes that we need. In fact, the Office for Budget Responsibility has said it expects this measure to increase house prices and only result in an additional 3,500 sales. On the NHS, meanwhile, experts and health professionals are agreed that it is approaching breaking point. The chief executive of NHS England has said it needs £4 billion this year to prevent it from collapsing. Yet the Government has brought forward less than half what is needed. Furthermore, for those in social care, with the system still approaching what the Care Quality Commission calls “tipping point”, the Chancellor has not offered a single penny.

The Government appears to be completely out of touch with the state of our economy, and with no understanding of the consequences of its choices. What is needed is a long-term investment strategy, especially for housing. Instead, the Budget confirmed that this is a Government without a plan to fix the housing crisis.

## **Universal Credit (Government Statement)**

On Thursday, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions made a statement to the House of Commons on Universal Credit (UC).

The Secretary of State said the Government was offering a £1.5 billion package of improvements to respond to concerns about the programme. He went on to provide detail on changes to UC announced in the Autumn Budget. These included: the provision of housing benefit directly to landlords in the private rented sector; a repayment extension and increase for advance payments; the launch of electronic applications for advances; the removal of the initial seven-day waiting period; and an additional two weeks of housing benefit to aid claimants' transition to UC. He also stated that £8 million had been allocated over four years to conduct trials on how to support people into work, and that the UC roll-out plan had been revised to allow for a smooth transition.

While I welcome any steps to improve the UC programme, I believe these measures are not enough. The reforms will not be introduced until next year and will leave tens of thousands of families going without over the festive period. Furthermore, the Government has only removed a single week from the waiting period, payments will still only be paid monthly and there has been no change to the assessment period for the self-employed.

Social security should prevent people getting into debt, rather than making matters worse. I am deeply concerned that UC is causing poverty, and this week's announcements have done nothing to restore the ambition that work will always pay.

## **Contact Alan**

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## **EU (Withdrawal) Bill (Committee Stage, Day Three)**

On Tuesday, the House of Commons continued line-by-line scrutiny of the Government's EU Withdrawal Bill.

Last week, I voted for amendments to protect workers' rights and environmental standards, and to provide for transitional arrangements to prevent a cliff edge as we leave the EU. Disappointingly, the amendments were defeated by Government MPs.

This week, I supported amendments focused on three main areas: the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; retaining the existing principles of EU law within UK law; and retaining the Francovich rule.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights brings together in a single document the fundamental rights protected inside the EU. It has been an important human rights instrument, particularly in evolving areas such as privacy protections, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and rights for the elderly. However, the EU Withdrawal Bill currently exempts the Charter from being converted into domestic law. I voted for an amendment that would have removed this exemption. Unfortunately, Government MPs voted against the amendment and it was defeated. The Government did, however, commit to a review of the implications of removing the Charter from UK law.

I also voted for amendments on Tuesday to retain the existing principles of EU law within UK law, and to retain the right to sue for damages under the Francovich rule. While these amendments were also rejected by the Government and defeated, the Government did commit to looking again on the issues around Francovich.