



**Alan Campbell MP Weekly Update**

**Friday 25th May 2018**



# Commons News

## **NHS Outsourcing and Privatisation (Opposition Day Debate)**

On Wednesday, the House of Commons debated an Opposition motion calling on the Government to provide details on its proposals for reform of the Health and Social Care Act, on the creation of accountable care organisations and on the effect of outsourcing and privatisation in the NHS.

We are eight years into the biggest financial squeeze in the history of the NHS, yet the Government has refused time and again to give it the funding required. It is patients who are paying the price.

The NHS has just suffered the worst winter in its history, with hospitals overcrowded and A&E departments logjammed. Indeed, the number of hospitals operating at the highest emergency alert level was nearly double what it was the year before.

The Government is reportedly proposing to amend the Health and Social Care Act.

At the 2017 general election, I stood on a manifesto promising to repeal the Act, which puts profits before patients and has created fragmentation within the health service. According to the Department of Health's own figures, £9 billion is now spent on private providers – a doubling in cash terms since 2010.

I believe any new legislation should move towards greater collaboration. It should bring an end to the creeping privatisation of the NHS and should restore a public universal national health service.

More widely, while I support greater integration and accountability, I am concerned that the Government's proposed model of accountable care organisations is a major barrier to real integration of health and social care.

The enforcement of competition obstructs collaboration and the efficient organisation of services. The increase in competition and markets in the Health and Social Care Act has not led to shorter waits, innovations in care or better services. I believe the provision of healthcare is too important to be left to market forces.

I support a long-term economic plan for the NHS, backed by an additional £45 billion across the next Parliament. This would be funded by increasing taxation on the very wealthiest in society and would ensure a long-term, sustainable plan for the NHS. As we celebrate 70 years of our NHS,

I urge the Government to bring forward proposals for a properly funded, comprehensive and reintegrated public health service that is free at the point of use.

While I voted for the Opposition motion on Wednesday, the Government voted against it and it was defeated.

## **Transport Secretary: East Coast Franchise (Opposition Day Debate)**

On Wednesday, the House of Commons considered an Opposition motion to censure the Transport Secretary for his handling of the East Coast franchise. The motion also called on the Government to reduce the Transport Secretary's ministerial salary by £2,400 per year.

I believe there has been a lack of candour around the future of the East Coast franchise. The Transport Secretary has fallen short several times in matters of clarity and courtesy in his ministerial conduct. The saga is littered with incompetence and delusion, alongside a cavalier regard for the public and passenger interest by a succession of Transport Ministers. Furthermore, I am concerned that the Government's unimaginative and ill-thought-out response to the current crisis threatens the taxpayer's interest.

The Department for Transport clearly failed in the process of drawing up the East Coast franchise agreement. The franchising model is based on ever-growing passenger numbers, yet since 2010 fares have risen at three times the rate of wages. Passengers are being priced off the railway. This declining usage threatens the integrity and financial sustainability of the railway and the franchising system itself, as other operators find themselves in similar trouble to Virgin-Stagecoach on the east coast.

Around four other franchises are on the brink of collapse. I believe the Transport Secretary should bring each of these contracts immediately under public control. He has a responsibility to act against the future failure of our vital public services. Unfortunately, I am concerned that he is instead attempting to prop up the franchising model for ideological reasons.

Since 2010, there have been more direct awards than successful franchising competitions. The system resembles state-sponsored monopolies rather than a market where franchises make bids they are expected to honour. It is clear that the Government's transport policies fail the public daily. I believe we need a fully integrated unified railway wholly under public ownership. This would serve the interests of British citizens and our communities, jobs and businesses.

## **Gaza: UN Human Rights Council Vote (Urgent Question)**

On Monday, the Government was asked an urgent question on its decision to abstain on a vote at the UN Human Rights Council relating to Gaza

On Friday last week, the UN Human Rights Council passed a resolution calling for an independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate the recent violence in Gaza. Twenty-nine countries voted for the resolution. Two countries voted against the resolution and the UK was one of 14 countries to abstain.

In explaining the Government's decision, the Minister for the Middle East said the Government had concerns that the wording of the resolution was not impartial or balanced. He called on Israel to carry out an inquiry into its forces' conduct on the Gaza border and for this to include international members.

I welcome the independent UN investigation into the violence in Gaza. However, it is disappointing that after expressing support for such an independent and transparent investigation, the Government chose not to vote for it.

## **Tenant Fees Bill (Second Reading)**

On Monday, the House of Commons debated the Tenant Fees Bill at second reading.

Tenants are charged hundreds of pounds a year for any of a variety of fees when renting a property. Before moving in, charges can include a holding deposit, a registration fee, an administration fee and a fee for a reference check. Tenants can also be charged fees to renew and exit a contract. Some even have to pay the letting agent to provide a reference for their new landlord.

This Bill seeks to help tenants with the cost of private renting by restricting the fees that landlords and letting agents can charge. I have long supported proposals to ban letting agent fees paid by tenants. I therefore welcome the Bill. However, I have concerns about its shortcomings, including loopholes that may allow landlords and agents to pass on unfair costs to tenants.

The Government is proposing that a refundable tenancy deposit – reserved for any damages or defaults on the part of the tenant – be capped at no more than six weeks' rent. However, most landlords already charge six weeks' rent as a deposit. This important aspect of the Bill will therefore have little effect. The housing charity Shelter and Citizens Advice are among those who have argued that deposits should be capped at four weeks' rent.

Although the Bill is satisfactory in many respects, it still provides the opportunity for the continuation of an exploitative approach. "Default fees" can be charged by landlords for breaches of contract such as lost keys or fines for late rent payment. The Government is proposing that tenants can still be charged a default fee. However, the lack of clarity in the Bill over what can be defined as a "default" means this measure is open to abuse.

The Bill passed its second reading on Monday and will now proceed to committee stage for further scrutiny.

## **Serious Violence Strategy (General Debate)**

On Tuesday, there was a debate in the House of Commons on the Serious Violence Strategy. The Government announced the Serious Violence Strategy on 9 April 2018. It pledged up to £40 million to address the root causes of the problem by focusing on early intervention and prevention, supporting communities and local partnerships.

The Serious Violence Strategy contains some concerning statistics. The homicide rate rose from 553 in 2011-12 to 628 in 2016-17. Knife crime was up from just over 28,000 offences in 2011-12 to more than 32,000 in 2016-17. These statistics are about young lives being ruined or endangered. There is an urgent need for intervention.

I welcome the broad themes of the Serious Violence Strategy. However, it is also important to consider the resources available to tackle this issue. Since 2010, over 21,000 police officers have been lost. More than 18,000 police staff and over 6,800 community support officers have also been axed. Yet despite these damning statistics, the Serious Violence Strategy made no mention of police cuts.

Cuts to youth services and early intervention have also dealt a serious blow to efforts to address the root causes of crime. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been cut from youth services.

The Government must also put resources into its strategy to stop serious violence. It should urgently recruit 10,000 police officers to put the police back on the front line and to engage in proactive policing to tackle the rise in serious violence.

## Housing and Homes (General Debate)

On Tuesday, the House of Commons debated the Government's record on housing and homes.

Since 2010, the rate of home-ownership has fallen to a 30-year low. The latest English Housing Survey shows that the number of under-45s who own their own home is down by over one million since 2010.

The number of households renting privately has risen to almost five million throughout the country. Yet research finds that 27% of private rented homes are "non-decent", while private rents on new lets have reached an average of £800 per month – an annual increase of over £1,800 since 2010. I support new consumer rights for renters, with legal minimum standards, more secure tenancies, a cap on rent rises and local licensing to drive out rogue landlords.

There is a shortage of affordable homes under this Government. Last year, the number of social rented homes built was the lowest on record and the number of new low-cost homes to buy has halved since 2010. The public expect much more – more urgency, more responsibility, more investment and more action to fix this broken housing market. We need a bold, long-term plan for housing, including commitments to build one million new genuinely affordable homes over ten years and the largest council house building programme for more than 30 years.

Rough sleeping has more than doubled since 2010 to an estimated 4,751 people. I believe this is a direct result of Government decisions, including cuts to housing benefits and homelessness services, and 170,000 fewer council homes than in 2010, as well as soaring rents in the private sector.

I believe the Government's record on housing is eight years of failure on all fronts. Ministers must set out a bold, long-term plan to fix the housing crisis, bringing forward radical proposals to increase the number of genuinely affordable homes, set out stronger regulation of the private rented sector and tackle rising homelessness.

## Leaving the EU: Customs (Opposition Day Debate)

On Wednesday, MPs debated an Opposition motion that would have forced the Government to publish papers, including economic analyses, relating to its preferred options for customs arrangements after Brexit.

The Government has said it will publish a white paper outlining its proposals for the future relationship between the UK and the EU, including customs arrangements, in June.

It is extraordinary in my view that that nearly two years on from the referendum the Government still has no idea what future customs arrangements will be or how it will avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland.

I reject both options being considered by the Government, neither of which are practical or acceptable to the EU.

I believe we should instead seek to negotiate a new comprehensive customs union with the EU covering all goods.

This is one of the most important decisions faced by our country in generations, yet the Cabinet is unable to agree.

MPs have a responsibility to stand up for the people we represent and we require access to the necessary information in order to do so. Unfortunately, the motion was opposed by the Government on Wednesday and was defeated. Instead of arguing with itself, the Government should drop its flawed customs proposals and let Parliament vote on a future customs union with the EU.