

Opposite views from Westminster

5 September 2022



As explained when launching our **View from Westminster** feature the Epsom and Ewell Times will occasionally carry viewpoints from the other parties. Here is **Mark Todd**, Labour's local Parliamentary spokesperson's first contribution.

After Two Months of In-Fighting, Now It's Time for Action

Today Liz Truss has been elected as the leader of the Conservatives and hence Prime Minister. Elected as the leader of this country by just 0.3 % of the population. Truss now needs to move quickly from her jingoistic hard right policies aimed at getting votes from Conservative Party hardliners to policies that will help her citizens.

The UK is in turmoil and people are petrified about the winter ahead. They are also at a loss to understand the lack of leadership by the government during the two month leadership contest.

With energy bills skyrocketing, the NHS in crisis due to a lack of staffing, resources and the collapse in social care; the climate crisis deepening by the day, polluted rivers and beaches, and a cost of living crisis so bad that many can no longer afford the basics in life: food to eat and heat and light for their homes.

Boris Johnson was allowed to remain as Prime Minister and how did this help the country? He partied at Chequers, posed in various publicity shoots and went on holiday after holiday.

In fact, this Summer has been the perfect summation of his disastrous premiership. It has shown how much his time in charge has actually been about him and Carrie getting what they want, not the country.

And, at the same time, most of Mr. Johnson's Cabinet have been missing in action; either off on holiday or trying to ingratiate themselves with Liz Truss or Rishi Sunak to secure a job going forward.

One incident that I particularly noted was on the 7th August when former Prime Minister Gordon Brown called for the government to act on the energy crisis on Radio 4's Today programme. The Conservative minister's response was hollow, talking about why Rishi Sunak was the best candidate for leader, not what the Government would do now to tackle the crisis.

Tribalism and party self-interest have been the priority.

The new Prime Minister and Cabinet need to decide rapidly how they stop people falling into terrible poverty.

They need to do it now, not next week, not tomorrow, now!!!

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The View from Westminster: Chris Grayling MP on Military aid to Ukraine, Energy levy and the Queen

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The situation in Ukraine remains appalling and the brutality that has been wreaked on its people defies understanding. I think that most of us thought that this kind of war was a part of European history and that a military strategy that involved blasting cities to pieces one shell at a time was a part of the past. It will take decades to rebuild the damage.

I am glad that the UK has been at the forefront of helping the Ukrainian people. We were the main country to provide them with military equipment and training after the Russians seized Crimea and have supported them through the build-up to the War and as they try to resist the invasion. It is vital that this support should continue.

The conduct of the Russian leadership has been a brutal reminder of the real consequences of aggressive dictatorship, and of tight state-run media propaganda machines. For all of the frustrations that people may level at our democracy from time to time, the alternative is much much worse. No system of Government will ever be perfect, but the Ukraine War has been a timely reminder to the democratic world of just how important our values and our systems are, where Governments can be removed at the ballot box and where their decisions are subject to real scrutiny and open debate.

I want also to thank our fantastic team of volunteers locally who have been raising funds, sending goods and providing support to the refugees arriving here. Also to the families that have taken them in. I know that the system has been much too slow, though there are genuine safeguarding issues that have needed to be taken into account. But there is some great work being done in Epsom for the refugees and I am very grateful to all of those involved.

The cost of living issue remains a huge challenge for many people locally. The surge in energy costs particularly is unprecedented in recent years. The last time that there was anything like this was in the oil crisis of 1974.

I hope that the measures announced by the Chancellor last week will help those worst affected. The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies said after the announcement that it should insulate the poorest families from the impact of this year's increases.

But I can't pretend that things will be easy still, with a combination of the continuing impact of the pandemic in Asia, and the impact of the war in Ukraine having

major consequences around the world. As big as the worries here though are the potential implications for people in the developing world. Ukraine has been a big supplier of food to many African countries, and with rising prices and short supplies, the risks are that there will be real shortages there too.

My view is that we will need to step up food production in this country wherever we sensibly can, and provide the right support to farmers to invest in that extra capacity. And we will need to be ready to target our aid budgets on those areas in the developing world that risk being worst affected.

I was hugely privileged in my time in Government to serve as both Lord Chancellor and Lord President of the Council, chairing the Queen's Privy Council. In both those roles, I had regular contact with and meetings with the Queen.

This weekend's Platinum Jubilee is an extraordinary national event, celebrating one of the most distinguished reigns this country has ever seen. She is someone that we should all be extremely proud of, and grateful to.

But I have also been fortunate enough to see her first-hand as a person. So I know her not just to be a great figurehead for this country, but as an incredibly smart, decent and likeable person. No one else could possibly have done the job that she has done, and done so with determination, kindness and a smile. She is quite simply extraordinary.

The View from Westminster: Local MP Chris Grayling has his say on Ukraine, Railway Services and the Cost of Living crisis.

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In today's 'View from Westminster' The Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP presents his thoughts on important national and local issues

UKRAINE

The situation in Ukraine is beyond awful. It may be the first time that a war like this has been fought in such a public way given the ready availability of mobile phone cameras and social media. But we are seeing the realities of wars that have been fought in the past happening again now in the 21st century in a way we thought would not happen again in Europe.

We can take some consolation in the way in which the Ukrainians are fighting back, and from the fact that the United Kingdom has done as much as any other country in helping them to do so. But it's hard to see how the trail of human misery and atrocity does not continue for months to come.

I know how frustrated many people here are that we cannot do more, but equally starting a direct conflict between NATO and Russia would be a quantum worse even than what we are seeing now.

But the local effort here to do something at least to help has been tremendous. The volunteer team in the Ashley Centre who have raised both funds and donations of medical and other equipment for Ukraine have been fantastic.

So have all the local families who have offered to host refugees, and are now starting to do so. I know it has all taken much too long, and I have told those managing the process so. But equally there do have to be some checks both for safeguarding reasons and also because those coming here are being given full access to public services, so we need to know who they are and where they are going.

Let us hope that those who do come here are able to make a return journey home before too long, and that a way is found to bring this dreadful conflict to an end.

THE RAILWAY SERVICE

The situation on our local rail routes remains unacceptable, even though the industry faces big challenges. I am doing what I can to get the situation improved.

The difficulties have been exacerbated by the number of staff off sick, but essentially the core problem is this.

The railways almost all run at a loss and are subsidised by the taxpayer. During the pandemic, with a dramatic drop in the number of passengers, this subsidy went through the roof. Now that things are back to normal, far fewer people are travelling and are working from home much of the time. So Ministers want to adjust the subsidy back to a normal level but to support a timetable that fits with the new normal in terms of passenger numbers.

The problem we have is that our lines, particularly the route into Waterloo, have recovered faster than most but the timetable has not changed to reflect that. I am working on trying to get that situation resolved.

THE COST OF LIVING

The cost of living crisis is really starting to bite, and I know that things are very difficult for many people. The rise in energy prices is now on a scale last seen during the Oil Crisis of 1974, and it is affecting countries around the world.

We are at least in a position where very little of our energy comes from Russia, unlike some other European countries which are wholly dependent on Russia. Nor are there easy solutions to this, as we are already taxing too much in this country and there aren't easily available ways of financing a big cut for consumers.

Some people have called for a windfall tax on energy companies, but they already pay a much higher rate of tax than other businesses. And while I would like to see VAT on fuel cut, it is true that this disproportionately benefits those who are bigger users of energy and so are generally the better off. More will need to be done though before we get to next winter to ease the pressure on many families.

But I have to be honest and say there are no easy solutions in the short term. We have to make sure that we are as immune as possible from this kind of issue in the future. That means a big investment in wind and solar energy, and in nuclear as back-up for when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow.

But we also need more gas now while we make the transition to low emission generation. And it should be produced here. The carbon emissions from gas that is shipped in from the Middle East are estimated to be twice as high as those from gas coming from the North Sea. It makes no sense to ignore what we have here as a way of making us more secure against energy shocks in the future.