

## Nigel Huddleston's March Report

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## March Report

March saw the Chancellor of the Exchequer make his latest Budget statement on the nation's finances. The Chancellor reviewed the current economic situation and set out his latest proposals for taxation. He spoke for just over an hour, nothing compared to William Gladstone's 1853 speech which holds the record for the longest Budget statement at a painstaking 4 hours and 45 minutes. Gladstone also holds the record for delivering more Budget speeches than any other Chancellor and was the first Chancellor to use the red Budget Box to carry his speech to the House of Commons. Another tradition of Budget Day is that the Chancellor, unlike Ministers at the Despatch Box at any other time of year, may drink alcohol during the Budget Speech. The last Chancellor to keep up this tradition was Ken Clarke, who drank Scotch Whisky whilst making his speech, George Osborne however once again stuck to water, so it's fair to say this was a

sober and sensible budget, both in content and delivery.

There was of course a renewed emphasis on the need for fiscal discipline to steer the nation's finances out the red and into the black. I particularly welcome measures to bring forward a sugar tax, something which I have [called for previously](#), a rise in the tax free personal allowance, a freeze in fuel duty, more investment in flood defences and lower, simpler taxes for small businesses. I have set out the announced Budget measures in more detail [on my website](#).

This month I have asked Parliamentary Questions of the [Chancellor of the Exchequer](#) on the national living wage's effect on farming, the [Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy](#) on the Digital Single Market, the [Secretary of State for Health](#) on healthcare spending and the [Financial Secretary to the Treasury](#) on the Scotland Bill. I have also taken part in debates on [apprenticeships](#) and spoken on the Budget both in regard to [disability support](#) and [income tax](#).

I continue to host local schools in Parliament, with this month pupils from St Barnabas School making the trip down. I hope all schools in the constituency have the chance to come down and visit Parliament. The Parliament Education Centre is a world-class education facility that inspires and connects young people with Parliament and democracy. If you are a teacher please do think about bringing down your class, or if you're a parent do encourage your child's school to consider a visit. The next telephone bookings day for autumn term 2016 school visits will be Friday 29 April - see [here](#) for more information.

In last month's report I heaped praise on the Regal Cinema in Evesham after a recent visit. I was pleased to return this month to unveil their new sign - a retro read-o-graph. On a smaller screen, last week I appeared on the Sunday Politics West Midlands with Patrick Burns, alongside Khalid Mahmood, MP for Birmingham Perry Barr. If you missed it, you can [catch up on BBC iPlayer](#).

The [Culture, Media and Sport committee](#) this month heard from BT Chief Executive, Gavin Patterson. I [shared my frustrations](#) and those of my constituents about BT's poor level of customer service with him. As I said to Mr Patterson in the committee, I do feel like my office and I are doing his job for him by chasing BT's customer service failures. Broadband has been and continues to be the number one issue I spend my time working on.

On the subject of telecoms, I am pleased that Ofcom has [answered my calls for simpler mobile switching](#), following my [debate on the subject](#) in Parliament last year. They have outlined alternative options to make switching between mobile operators quicker and simpler to encourage mobile users to look for better and cheaper mobile contracts and support competition in the market.

This month I [led a debate in Parliament on middle schools and three-tier education](#), in which the Minister for Schools clarified that there were no plans to remove the three-tier education system. I called for the

debate because I have been contacted by parents asking for advice and guidance on the advantages and disadvantages of middle schools and some local schools have also been considering changing their age ranges which could impact the long term viability of some middle schools in Worcestershire. The Minister clarified that the organisation of schools is an issue for local authorities, schools and parents, and that statutory processes were in place for any moves from three-tier to two-tier systems. The Minister also offered to meet with middle schools in the constituency to clarify legislation and the Government's position. I have written to all local Middle Schools to invite them to this meeting which will take place in April. You can read my speech and the Minister's response in full [here](#).

Sticking with education, the Education Secretary made a welcome statement this month about fairer funding, with the government launching the first stage of its consultation on a new national funding formula for schools. Our next step must be ensuring that Worcestershire gets the best deal possible out of the new funding formula. I encourage schools, governors and interested parties to respond to the consultation so that young people in Worcestershire get the funding they need to fully reach their potential. The consultation is open until 17 April and can be accessed [here](#).

I have had another great excuse this month to celebrate our local produce. I marked British Pie Week by eating one of Fladbury Pies' award winning creations. We all know that the pie is a staple of British cuisine, with 75% of people enjoying a pie at least once a month and around £1 billion spent on pies every year in Britain. Pies are a matter taken seriously by many, with 5,687 people recently signing a Parliamentary petition to implement 'criminal sanctions upon the owners of food outlets that serve items described as pies without a pastry base'. Fortunately, this didn't reach the 10,000 signatures needed for a response from the government or 100,000 for a debate to be considered in Parliament! Pies were, however, a matter for government when in 1644 Oliver Cromwell banned pie as he decided it was a "pagan form of pleasure". Though thankfully the ban was short lived.

Fladbury Pies has become a real local institution and was featured last year in the Great British Food Trip on BBC2 and visited by the late Sir Terry Wogan. During his time at the butchers Sir Terry also tried his hand at decorating the Fladbury Pies famous pork pie wedding cake. We are blessed to live in an area with a huge variety of food growers, producers and sellers. They not only make our area more vibrant, but they also create hundreds of jobs and make a huge contribution to the local economy. Worcestershire, as illustrated by its feature on the BBC2 programme, is squarely on the food map of the UK. During his visit, Sir Terry also visited the Fleece Inn at Bretforton. I too was happy to visit the Fleece to congratulate them on making it to the final five of Visit England's tourism pub of the year, and I am even happier to now be able to congratulate them on winning the competition, this in addition to already being the Good Pub Guide's 'Country pub of the Year'.

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