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Features
Bloody marvel

Alice Jones
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Features | The 'tampon tax' has inspired female comics at the Edinburgh Fringe to take on the once-derided subject of menstruation, writes Alice Jones

It is just before midday on a Tuesday morning in Edinburgh and Bridget Christie is waving a pair of bloodstained knickers around her head, to the general delight of a sold-out crowd at The Stand.

Having spent the previous 45 minutes debunking Ukip, Jeremy Clarkson and Rachel Dolezal, she closes her show with a call to revolution... against the tampon tax. Women pay VAT on sanitary products because they are deemed luxury, non-essential items "unlike, say, herbal tea, houseboat moorings and flapjacks" - the latter of which Christie suggests women should start using as an alternative.

If you spend any amount of time at the Edinburgh Fringe you start to notice joke clusters, topics and ideas that a number of comedians have fallen upon and turned inside out for comic effect. It stands to reason - comedians read the same news stories and notice the same trends as the rest of us. They tend to hang out together, too, so it's not surprising that certain talking points take root. This year I've noticed clusters around Twitter trolls, Uber, emojis and pugs, for example. Tons of jokes about pugs - no idea why.

The really salient one though, the thing that has cropped up time and again in among the 50 or so shows I've seen this month, is menstruation. Come back! It's comedy, promise! Stand-up Tiffany Stevenson ends her excellent show, Mad Man, with a paean to her monthly cycle.

Rising musical comedian and YouTube star Jenny Bede brings her show of hip-hop parodies and feminist raps to a close with an uplifting song about periods and a red confetti canon. Daily Show producer Jena Friedman has a gag in which she compares Hillary Clinton to a Tampax.

Women's Hour sends tampons flying in one sketch and raps about cramps over Jason Derulo's "Talk Dirty" in another. Elsewhere, Chella Quint devotes an hour to the subject in her show, Adventures in Menstruating.

It used to be the done thing to deride female comedians for only talking about periods, even though few of them actually did. Before this year, I can't remember the last time I heard a routine on the topic. Even Jo Brand, often pegged as the period gagsmith par excellence, says that she didn't talk about them as much as everyone thought she did.

Now, a new wave of female comedians is reclaiming the period joke. As the Danish standup Sofie Hagen put it in a blog: "Most female comedians would not dare to talk about it, because most of us are too stubborn - we do not want to become the stereotype people have created about us. Unfunny, period-babbling, ovary-owning, kitchen-abandoning... Anyways. Why can't I talk about my period?" Their jokes are part of a zeitgeist that has seen women across the globe gleefully tweet Donald Trump about their menstrual cycles after he accused Megyn Kelly, the Fox News anchor, of being on her period ("She had blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever," he said). Elsewhere, the drummer Kiran Gandhi has been lauded for her decision to run a marathon while "free bleeding" (not wearing a tampon) to remove the stigma. The main comic inspiration at the Fringe is the tampon tax and the risible notion that sanitary products are considered less essential, and therefore more taxable, than a range of daft things like cake decorations, exotic meats and flapjacks. Bede ends her show at Pleasance Courtyard with a lush ballad on just this subject. "And it's largely gone down very well," she says. "I quite enjoy it if there's an uncomfortable reaction. You feel quite empowered."

Sh!T Theatre, aka Louise Mothersole and Rebecca Biscuit, also tackle the topic in their theatre/cabaret show Women's Hour at Summerhall. A dynamic take on the Radio 4 institution - "One whole hour out of 24!" - it

includes a violent takedown of Kinder eggs for girls and boys and a sexy R&B routine in which they sweep the floor and songs whose lyrics are harvested from online comments.

"The tampon tax is a thing that's so funny you can't quite believe it's true. The show is about pointing at things and saying: 'Come on guys, this isn't right,'" says Mothersole. "Ironically, we have to buy a lot of tampons for the show, so our budget is really affected," adds Biscuit.

The idea of one hour's broadcasting a day to cover everything about being a woman struck them as "hilarious, ridiculous, impossible". Like Woman's Hour, they jump between topics ("Some have genuinely been spoken about on Woman's Hour," points out Mothersole. "Ankle socks, culottes, hypertonic pelvic floor muscles, cooking the perfect buckwheat drop scone...") though it's unlikely that Jenni Murray has ever rapped about her ingrowing hairs.

The tampon tax has also inspired a spoof of Taylor Swift's video for "Bad Blood". Written by Bede and Cariad Lloyd, it assembles a host of female comedians and instead of the superhero aliases of Swift's squad, these kickass heroines have names like Madame Ovary and Toksvig Shock. It has had 160,000 views on YouTube so far.

"When I started looking into the tax, I was really shocked at all the things that were exempt - male razors, crocodile meat and so on," says Lloyd.

Stevenson's show is a wideranging, confident, feminist take-down of everything from Dubai to drinks advertising, female rappers to band T-shirts. She ends with a hymn to the "vagina house" she builds every month in her womb and a heartfelt exhortation to women to celebrate their bodies. "For a long time we felt shamed into silence and this is a kickback. I say, the more women talk about it, the merrier. Men are not afraid to talk about their penises."

"Lots of male comics have come on board with the idea," says Stevenson. "They say: 'Yes, why do you get battered over the head for only ever talking about periods? If I bled once a month for 40 years of my life it would be all I ever talked about.'" The Edinburgh Fringe continues until 31 August (edfringe.com)

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Mail Online

News

Ministers facing revolt over EU's 'tampon tax': Tory MPs to vote with Labour against VAT rules imposed by Brussels

GERRI PEEV and CLAIRE DUFFIN FOR THE DAILY MAIL
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* Politicians joining forces to make PM renegotiate so-called tampon tax

* Eurosceptic Tories teaming up with Scottish Nationalists and Lib Dems

* Women pay 5% levy on tampons because EU says they are 'luxury item'

* Campaigners say average woman spends £492/year on sanitary products

The Government risks its first Commons defeat tonight over what campaigners claim is a Brussels-imposed tax on women.

Eurosceptic Tories are joining forces with Labour, Scottish Nationalists and the Liberal Democrats to force David Cameron to renegotiate the so-called tampon tax.

They are demanding the Prime Minister confronts the European Union over the taxation of sanitary items as part of his renegotiation of Britain’s membership.

Women pay a 5 per cent levy on tampons and sanitary pads because the European Union decrees they are a ‘luxury item’.

Campaigners say on average, women spend £492 a year on sanitary products. Over a course of a lifetime, this equates to £18,450, of which £922 is tax.

MPs will tell the PM and Chancellor George Osborne that it is a matter of sovereignty for them to claw back Britain’s powers from the EU.

Last night, at least seven Tory MPs had signed up to the Labour amendment to the Finance Bill, including former Welsh secretary John Redwood, Steve Baker of the Eurosceptic group Conservatives for Britain, Andrew Rosindell, Anne Main, Karl McCartney, Craig MacKinlay and Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

With a thin working majority of 17, just nine Tories have to side with the Opposition to impose the legislative change.

It is an issue that affects over half the population, which our parliament has no power over Steve Baker, Conservative MP

It is understood an ambush is being planned, with more Tories poised to vote for the amendment at the last minute.

MPs were last night quietly confident of rounding up enough support to force the Government to go back to Brussels and seek a renegotiation of tax powers.

Mr Baker, who represents Wycombe, told the Mail: ‘It is an issue that affects over half the population, which our parliament has no power over.

‘We want the Prime Minister to start renegotiating this power back from Brussels so that our politicians can do what is right.’

REAL LUXURIES EXEMPT FROM TAX

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Luxury items ranging from ostrich meat and alcoholic jellies to boats and even helicopters are exempt from VAT.

But sanitary products qualify for the tax because they are said to be ‘non-essential, luxury’ goods.

There are three VAT rates in the UK: the 20 per cent standard rate, which applies to most goods and services; a reduced rate of 5 per cent; and zero-rated, which includes food and drink.

In 2000 the rate on sanitary items was dropped from the old top level of 17.5 per cent to 5 per cent following a campaign by Labour MP Dawn Primarolo.

But the Government has said it cannot go any lower because of EU rules which forbid scrapping VAT once it has been imposed or introducing new zero-rated items.

Five per cent is the lowest rate allowed under Britain’s agreements with European partners.

A wealth of luxury groceries fall among zero-rated items because all food and drink is exempt.

They include candied peel, herbal tea, exotic meat such as horse, ostrich, crocodile and kangaroo, and ready meals.

Also on the zero VAT list are slimming meal replacement products, savoury snacks and alcoholic dessert jellies.

Helicopters and aircraft used for passenger and freight transport – but not private use – and boats also qualify, although vessels used for recreation or pleasure do not.

Other 5 per cent items include products to help people stop smoking.

Mr Rosindell said: ‘This is a matter of sovereignty and making our own decisions. It is about being able to set our own VAT rates and not for the EU to do it. It is a matter of principle.’

In an unusual move, the Eurosceptics will rally behind a feminist cause and ally themselves with left-wing MPs.

It also unites the hard left of the Labour Party including Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, with Blairites such as John Woodcock and Wes Streeting.

If passed, the amendment will give a boost to Jeremy Corbyn after weeks of infighting and questions over his leadership of Labour.

Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP for Dewsbury who tabled the amendment, said she was delighted to receive the backing of Tory MPs, Liberal Democrats and the SNP.

‘It’s something that has bugged me for years, I’ve signed petitions on it in the past but now that I’m an MP, I can actually have a forum to do something about it,’ she said.

‘I’m grateful for that cross-party support. For me, it’s an issue fundamentally of what’s right and what’s wrong.

‘Sanitary products are an essential, not luxury, item. Yet they are taxed while goods such as pistachio nuts, helicopter repairs and crocodile steaks are not.’

The SNP, which has tabled an almost identical amendment to Labour, says it will back Miss Sherriff’s version if the Speaker decides to favour it.

The amendment would force the Prime Minister to report on his progress over renegotiating on sanitary products by April.

But a Treasury spokesman said: ‘Reduced rates on VAT are governed by EU law. The UK has set the VAT on sanitary products at the minimum rate permissible under EU rules.’

Any change would require overhauling EU-wide VAT legislation which would require a proposal from the European Commission and the unanimous backing of all 28 member states.

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DailyMail.com

News

WE'LL TELL BRUSSELS TO AXE THE TAMPON TAX, VOWS MINISTER

BY DANIEL MARTIN CHIEF

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A MINISTER last night pledged to take the fight to scrap the 'tampon tax' to Europe, in a bid to avoid a humiliating Commons defeat for the Tories.

Eurosceptic rebels have complained that the VAT on sanitary products should not be set at 5 per cent.

The rate is determined by the EU, and Treasury minister David Gauke has admitted that it may be difficult to persuade all the other member states to reduce the VAT on tampons to zero.

However Mr Gauke has now insisted that the Government will discuss the issue with the European Commission and the 28 other EU countries, as part of David Cameron's bid to claw back powers from Brussels.

The move comes after a dozen Tory backbenchers supported an amendment to the Finance Bill demanding action on high taxes on sanitary products, which critics said amounts to an EU attack on women.

Steve Baker, one of the Conservative rebels, welcomed the fact that the Treasury has now accepted that the fight against the tampon tax will have to be taken to Brussels.

'This is a step on the road to victory for women, and it's also a victory for those of us who want to take back full control from the EU,' he added.

Mr Baker, the MP for Wycombe, went on to say: 'At last we have found an issue that is easy to understand, that matters to at least half the population, and shows what parliamentary sovereignty means.

'It is obvious that it is the right thing to do, but we can't do it, because we are in the EU.'

There are widely varying rates of VAT imposed across the continent, with Hungary imposing a 27 per cent rate on tampons and sanitary pads. The average levy across the union is 17 per cent.

But countries are not allowed to cut the rate below 5 per cent, because the European Community has decreed that tampons are a 'luxury item'.

Campaigners say that, on average, women spend £492 a year on sanitary products. Over the course of a lifetime, this equates to £18,450, of which £922 is tax. The amendment was put forward by Labour MP for Dewsbury, Paula Sherriff.

Among the Tories who signed up to the Labour amendment were former Welsh secretary John Redwood, and the Eurosceptic Conservative MPs Andrew Rosindell and Bill Cash. Another Tory supporter of the amendment, MP Bernard Jenkin, said: 'How can you call yourself a feminist and vote against this amendment? I've been on to this issue for 15 years.'

Yesterday a Downing Street spokesman said: 'The government sympathises with the issue here. The Prime Minister talked about this earlier in the year.' They added: 'The UK government has set the rate at the lowest level it can, which is significantly less than the EU average, which is 17 per cent.'

However the spokesman went on to play down any suggestion that discussing the issue in Europe would necessarily lead to a drop in VAT on tampons.

They warned that getting any meaningful change from Europe would involve the agreement of every member state, and pointed out that it may not be 'achievable' to get Europe-wide agreement on the issue.

The spokesman explained: 'This is a difficult issue to resolve because these measures are set at an EU level.

'What is being proposed is not something that, having looked at, we think is achievable because it would require the unanimous approval of 28 member states to change this.'

* David Cameron was accused of dropping 'any semblance of neutrality' in the EU debate after it emerged that he will use a speech this week to claim Britain will not be able to access the single market if it votes to leave.

Last night a spokesman for campaign group Vote Leave claimed that the Government is now 'explicitly fighting in the in-campaign's corner'.

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The Daily Telegraph

News

Brussels could allow Britain to abolish 'tampon tax'

MatthewHolehouse

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THE Treasury may be permitted to scrap the so-called "tampon tax" under proposals being considered by the European Commission, The Daily Telegraph has learnt.

Brussels is to publish a major review of EU-wide VAT rules next year, which will examine whether states could have greater powers over VAT rates - including control over which items are zero rated.

Were it to be approved, it may allow the Government to abolish the five per cent rate that currently applies to tampons, sanitary towels and other similar products.

The Commission wants to move swiftly on the issue, and officials are nervous that a row over the taxation of women's hygiene products may become a lightning rod for discontent during Britain's renegotiations.

"We are listening," said an EU source.

Last night David Gauke, the Treasury minister, quelled a rebellion in Tory ranks by promising to raise the "tampon tax" with the Commission.

It follows a cross-party alliance in Parliament between largely female campaigners - among them Labour's Paula Sherriff and the Greens' Caroline Lucas - and veteran Tory eurosceptics including Sir Bill Cash.

"We have a right and a duty to return to the people of this country the right to govern themselves," Sir Bill told the Commons last night. Ms Sherriff said it was a matter of "huge inequality".

In the UK women's sanitary goods attract VAT of five per cent, the lowest permitted rate under EU rules, against 20 per cent for most goods. The list of tax-free "essentials" includes food, children's clothes and razors.

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Mail Online

News

EU bosses tell Britain we CAN axe the tampon tax despite sanitary products being classed as a luxury by Brussels

DANIEL MARTIN, CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE DAILY MAIL and MARTIN ROBINSON FOR MAILONLINE

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DAMONL
English
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* European Commission vice-president says axing tampon tax 'reasonable'

* But Frans Timmermans says Britain chose not to raise it last time

* Ministers avoid Commons defeat by pledging to lobby to scrap tampon-tax

* Women paying 5% levy on tampons because EU says they are 'luxury item'

* Campaigners say average woman spends £492 a year on sanitary products

EU bosses today told Britain they can axe the so-called tampon tax amid fury that the product is classed as a luxury by Brussels.

Ministers last night avoided a defeat in the Commons by pledging to lobby the European Union to scrap the five per cent VAT on tampons of the UK.

Frans Timmermans, European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker's deputy, said this morning that it would be 'perfectly reasonable' for the tampon tax to go as part of David Cameron's renegotiation deal.

But he added that Britain had never asked for the VAT to be removed from tampons in the past and said EU members too often blamed Brussels for red tape they created themselves.

Mr Timmermans told the Today programme: 'In the light of the VAT reforms we are looking at it's perfectly reasonable for Britain ask for an exemption and I'm sure others will do the same.

'When it was decided before Britain did not ask for an exemption whereas Ireland did and do have leverage to charge 0% VAT on certain items'.

In a wide-ranging interview he also suggested that leaving the EU would not help Britain deal with the pressure of the current migration crisis.

Mr Timmermans told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme: 'Britain is already in a position to be able to control its borders, but if I look at continental European states who are not members of the EU - like Norway and Switzerland - they all see this refugee problem also as their problem.

'When we talk about the distribution of refugees, they want to be part of it. They have offered to be part of it. So they understand that, even when they are not in the EU, they are part of the problem, so they'd better be part of the solution. I'm not sure that by opting to leave the EU you would make things better for Britain

'The fact is that we can't solve this crisis individually, we will have to solve it together with other nations,' he said.

Last night a dozen Tory backbenchers had threatened to support a Labour amendment to the Finance Bill calling for the VAT rate imposed on sanitary products to be lowered.

The 5 per cent rate is determined by the EU, and Treasury minister David Gauke had admitted that it would be difficult to persuade all the other member states to reduce the VAT on tampons to zero.

But yesterday he pledged to take the fight to scrap the tax to Brussels, and managed to avoid a humiliating Commons defeat for the Tories – after 287 backed the rebel clause while 305 supported the Government and opposed it.

Mr Gauke has insisted that the Government will discuss the issue with the European Commission and the 28 other EU countries, as part of David Cameron's bid to claw back powers from Brussels.

Yesterday Steve Baker, one of the leading Tory MPs who had threatened to rebel over the issue, said he had decided to back the Government after the minister's intervention.

He said the best way to resolve the issue – which has been described as an EU attack on women – is to 'vote to leave the EU so our Parliament can decide'.

'This is a step on the road to victory for women, and it's also a victory for those of us who want to take back full control from the EU,' he added.

Mr Baker, the MP for Wycombe, went on to say: 'At last we have found an issue that is easy to understand, that matters to at least half the population, and shows what parliamentary sovereignty means. It's obvious it is the right thing to do, but we can't do it, because we are in the EU.'

There are widely varying rates of VAT imposed across the continent, with Hungary imposing a 27 per cent rate on tampons and sanitary pads. The average levy across the union is 17 per cent.

But countries are not allowed to cut the rate below 5 per cent, because the European Community has decreed that tampons are a 'luxury item'.

Campaigners say that, on average, women spend £492 a year on sanitary products. Over the course of a lifetime, this equates to £18,450, of which £922 is tax.

Yesterday Tory Eurosceptic MP Bernard Jenkin said Britain 'shouldn't go and beg to 27 other member states to change a rate of tax on an issue which we think is socially important'.

He added: 'This is an issue of national democracy and that's why these treaties are not fit for purpose.'

Yesterday a Downing Street spokesman said: 'The Government sympathises with the issue here. The Prime Minister talked about this earlier in the year.'

They added: 'The UK Government has set the rate at the lowest level it can, which is significantly less than the EU average, which is 17 per cent.'

However the spokesman went on to play down any suggestion that discussing the issue in Europe would necessarily lead to a drop in VAT on tampons.

They warned that getting any meaningful change from Europe would involve the agreement of every member state, and pointed out that it may not be 'achievable' to get Europe-wide agreement on the issue.

The spokesman explained: 'This is a difficult issue to resolve because these measures are set at an EU level. What is being proposed is not something we think is achievable as it would require the unanimous approval of 28 member states to change.'

In a separate development, David Cameron was accused of dropping 'any semblance of neutrality' in the EU debate after it emerged that he will use a speech this week to claim Britain will not be able to access the single market if it votes to leave.

Last night a spokesman for campaign group Vote Leave claimed the Government is now 'explicitly fighting in the in-campaign's corner'.

JUNCKER'S RIGHT-HAND MAN SAYS UK NEEDS EU TO SOLVE MIGRANT CRISIS

One of Europe's top bureaucrats said today Britain's problems with migrants won't be solved by leaving the EU because 'it is already able to control its borders'.

European Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans says the pressure of the current crisis would only be solved by European countries 'sharing' the burden.

Mr Timmermans told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme: 'Britain is already in a position to be able to control its borders, but if I look at continental European states who are not members of the EU - like Norway and Switzerland - they all see this refugee problem also as their problem.

'When we talk about the distribution of refugees, they want to be part of it. They have offered to be part of it. So they understand that, even when they are not in the EU, they are part of the problem, so they'd better be part of the solution. I'm not sure that by opting to leave the EU you would make things better for Britain.'

Mr Timmermans said the Commission had no 'strong views' on Mr Cameron's demand for Britain to be relieved of the requirement to participate in 'ever-closer union' with EU partners, and did not believe the other 27 member states would object to clarifying the issue.

Ever-closer union 'doesn't mean that you need to sign up to ever-closer integration at a political level', said Mr Timmermans.

But he added: 'If you think it means that and you want it to be clarified, I'm sure that other member states would like to help clarify that. I really don't see a problem there.'

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The Daily Telegraph

Editorial; Opinion Columns

A tampon tax is what happens when men make all the decisions

EMMA BARNETT

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Do you remember when Gordon Brown slashed the VAT rate on sanitary towels? Probably not. That's because our then chancellor unusually made no mention of said tax cut in his 2000 Budget. You see, he didn't want to use the word "tampon" at the despatch box, according to his former spin doctor, Damian McBride, who tells the juvenile tale in his book.

Fast-forward 15 years and depressingly not much has changed. Earlier this week, male MPs struggled to say the same word in a debate about the so-called "tampon tax". This is the 5 per cent VAT rate that stubbornly remains on all period products - ineligible for zero rating because the European Commission deems tampons (oops, I mentioned them again) "non-essential" items. Try telling that to any woman.

Female MPs and campaigners have been fighting for years to remove this ludicrous levy. If nappies for children, maternity pads for new mothers and incontinence aids are all exempt, why does Brussels have a peculiar problem with blood? After this week's exchanges in the Commons, David Gauke, the Treasury minister, said that he will "write" to another person (likely to be a man) in Brussels, to "raise the issue" - conveniently just before a Europe-wide review of VAT rules was announced.

But regardless of whether he secures either a UK exemption or change across all 28 countries, the tampon tax is a clear sign of what happens when there are no women at the top table.

When Edward Heath signed Britain up to the European Economic Community in 1973, his Cabinet, with the exception of the education secretary Margaret Thatcher, was entirely male. Our two European commissioners and the UK's chief negotiator, Geoffrey Rippon, were also men. And that was just on our side. These were the people setting the terms for a single trade bloc. Of course no one in this group, including the very few women present, argued for tampons as an essential item. The word probably wasn't in their vocabulary.

That is why women across Europe find ourselves today in the very odd position of being taxed for having periods. We are frozen in the Seventies.

It's only relatively recently that female MPs began highlighting such oversights, which are inevitable if politicians, business people and law enforcers do not fully represent the society they serve and aim to improve.

Today Lord Davies is expected to recommend, wisely, in his final report on female participation in business, that the Government should work to eliminate all-male boards across FTSE 350 companies.

An elite problem it may be, who sits atop the largest businesses, but there are trickle-down effects of having no or few female voices in the mix.

The tampon tax is just one, albeit small and baffling, example. And while I'm sure there was no antifemale conspiracy when Europe's VAT rules were written, what bothers me most is that women's needs weren't considered at all. Never mind spoken aloud.

Things in the developed world have greatly improved on this front - but look around you. How many senior male-only or maledominated meetings are still happening? If tampon-gate teaches us anything, it's to question what's not being talked about the most.

COMMENT on Emma Barnett's view at telegraph.co.uk/comment or FOLLOW her on Twitter @emmabarnett

Document DT00000020151029ebat0002i

theguardian

Life and style
Bridget Christie: feminine products a luxury? Hardly. At least Jeremy Corbyn understands

Bridget Christie
783 words
31 October 2015
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The Guardian
GRDN
5
English
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‘Corbyn is at least interested enough in the mysterious ways of the opposite sex’

Jeremy Corbyn may not be fit to lead the Labour party because he’s humourless and only got two Es in his A-levels, according to the suspiciously unsmiling, Oxford-educated novelist Martin Amis. Amis describes Corbyn as “ incurious about anything beyond his immediate sphere ”, but at least he’s interested enough in the mysterious ways of the opposite sex to understand why sanitary products might not qualify as “non-essential luxury items”, which is more than you can say for most other male politicians. Corbyn understands why sanitary towels and tampons, designed to absorb a woman’s menstrual flow – and save her from making a right old mess of her underpants, seats on public transport, seesaws and Peter Stringfellow’s pole-dancing poles – do not qualify as a luxury and therefore should not be liable for VAT.

Narrowly missing out on a major commons victory over the Conservatives, Corbyn has nonetheless united Eurosceptic Tory rebels, the Liberal Democrats, Scottish Nationalists – and probably even Ukip, the Greens and the Women’s Equality party; something not seen in British politics since David Cameron was accused of putting a private part of his anatomy into a dead pig’s head. The amendment to the finance bill, tabled by Labour MP Paula Sherriff, which would have forced George Osborne into a negotiation with the EU for a reduction in the 5% VAT rate, was ultimately rejected by 305 to 287 votes – though the government has agreed to raise the issue with the European commission. It was understood to have been backed by Eurosceptic Tories including former Welsh secretary John Redwood and Steve Baker, who leads the anti-EU group Conservatives for Britain, as well as shadow chancellor John McDonnell – all men are believed to have signed up using cartridge pens dipped in menstrual blood, in a feminist protest.

The “tampon tax”, imposed in the 1970s by someone who clearly hated women and their “luxurious” reproductive system, was cut by chancellor Gordon Brown in his 2000 budget from the full 17.5% rate to 5%, after lobbying from female Labour MPs. But the price of sanitary products still puts them beyond the reach of many women. When I was a student, in the mid-90s, I would steal toilet paper from public toilets and use that, rolled up, instead of “splashing out on pads”. It wasn’t ideal and would often slip down my trousers because of the lack of adhesive strip (before you ask; no, I couldn’t afford Sellotape either). I’ve also heard stories of female students taking the combined pill without a break, in order to avoid having periods.

But it’s not only students doing without. This half-term, many food banks braced themselves for a surge in demand, as children went without their school meals. Tory cuts, childcare costs and low wages are leaving mothers desperate, having to decide between feeding their children, having the heating on, or the luxury of wearing a sanitary towel. The UN Human Rights office called the stigma around menstrual hygiene “a violation of several human rights, most importantly the right to human dignity”. In countries where sanitary products are unaffordable, girls miss days from school and women lose pay. In many US prisons, women have to buy their own sanitary products, and with tampons costing as much as $5, many go without.

Single-issue campaigns and activists, such as Laura Coryton, whose change.org petition to end the tampon tax has gained more than 252,000 signatures, are often singled out by anti-feminists and idiots for not focusing on the “bigger” issues facing women, such as female genital mutilation, early or forced marriage, domestic violence or rape. But the anti-feminists and idiots seem to forget that the women who are facing those issues also have periods, for which they are taxed, and that being able to manage those periods is a matter of dignity and a basic human right.

Related: David Cameron faces possible Commons defeat on 'tampon tax'

I’ve been suggesting that, until the government lifts VAT on sanitary products, women instead use items the chancellor considers essential and which are therefore tax exempt to absorb their menstrual flows – such as

crocodile meat, herbal tea, flapjacks and alcoholic jellies – and dispose of them in irresponsible and unhygienic ways, in public spaces. I haven’t seen any evidence of that revolution yet, but I live in hope.

* Bridget Christie appears at the Leicester Square theatre, London, from 16 November-2 December

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DAILY EXPRESS

Tampon tax is not an issue

Jennifer Selway
516 words
31 October 2015
The Daily Express
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TAMPONS rarely make the headlines. But this week the "tampon tax" has been the big subject. More than 250,000 people called on the Government to "stop taxing periods" and reduce the five per cent rate of VAT. The Government says it cannot scrap the VAT because of EU law. Suddenly the price of tampons has become an occasion for feminist outrage and the VAT yet another manifestation of the evil patriarchy.

This row dates back to the 1970s when we joined the European Economic Community as it was then called. Some basic items - such as certain foodstuffs - were zero-rated then. They were to be kept but no new zero-rated items were to be added. For instance books were zero-rated but ebooks are not because Kindles were not around in the 1970s.

You can make a very good argument that tampons are basic essentials but then so is toothpaste and so are many other things that are not zero-rated. There are such a host of anomalies that it is absurd to pick on one - the whole thing needs to be sorted out rather than picked away at on a piecemeal basis.

The anti-tax campaigners claim that a woman spends £492 on tampons and what-have-you every year. Over a course of a lifetime's menstruation this comes to £18,450, of which £922 is VAT. And that sounds quite a lot.

But these figures are ridiculous. Any woman who spends that much needs to seek urgent medical attention or is already dead of a haemorrhage. A box of 20 Tampax actually costs £2.95 (own brand supermarket ones are even cheaper). If you use one box each month that is "We £35.40 a year of which £1.77 is VAT. Yes the massive sum of £1.77! I know every little helps but it's not an amount of money that would get me out on the street with a banner, I can tell you.

This absurd wimmin-pleasing motion to scrap the VAT was brought by Labour (of course) and defeated. What a waste of parliamentary time, though Frans Timmermans, European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker's deputy, has now said that it would be "perfectly reasonable" for the tampon tax to go as part of David Cameron's renegotiation deal. That's big of him. And at the present rate of progress it could represent the entirety of Cameron's renegotiation deal.

IN SOME countries tampons are prized items. I once travelled to Peru with a group of women journalists on some assignment. At Lima airport (a pretty lawless place at the time) our suitcases were ransacked and various items stolen. All our tampons were gone. Every single one.

I liked to imagine the bandits' wives with flashing eyes sending their men out with the instruction: "Go get me gringas' Tampax, Juan, or no cha-chacha for you."

They'd return home triumphant with their bandoliers draped round their necks loaded with Lil-Lets rather than bullets. Girl power.

Document THEEXP0020151031ebav00035

Mail Online

Femail

The Milk Tray-style advert that ridicules tampons being taxed as a luxury item

PHOEBE JACKSON-EDWARDS FOR MAILONLINE
469 words
3 November 2015
14:07
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
Copyright 2015

* Bip Seller, from Manchester, mocked the idea tampons are luxury in a clip

* She showed a woman enjoying a tampon, similar to the Milk Tray adverts

* The 90-second clip has been viewed 40,000 times on YouTube

At first glance, this video appears to be an advert for chocolate or beauty products.

However, on closer inspection, despite its sensual music and indulgent setting, this isn't footage for a new product - it's a parody film mocking the fact that tampons are taxed as a luxury item.

Bip Seller, from Manchester, filmed the clip - which shows a glamorous woman rolling around in satin nightwear in a stylish apartment - in protest against the five per cent VAT added to the sanitary products.

The footage - which resembles the iconic Milk Tray advert - has been viewed on YouTube more than 40,000 times after mocking the tax by looking at the concept of tampons being a desirable item.

Although the tampon tax was reduced to five per cent in 2000, Bip argues that is still too much considering a woman will spend around £1,500 on sanitary products in her life.

Bip claimed on her website that some of the other products that are not taxed because they are essential, include Jaffa cakes, caravans and edible cake decorations.

Tampons have been taxed since 1973 as they are classed as a luxury item.

The 90-second clip opens during a stormy night in a muted but stylish apartment with a woman wandering about in a satin chemise.

The woman, with tumbling, glossy hair, opens an ornate box and breathlessly pulls out a tampon.

Reclining on the plush sofa, she incessantly rubs the tampon over her face and then trails it down her body, before the screen fades out.

Bip set up a site called Luxuriously Taxable to draw attention to the problem and included a petition for others to sign if they want the tax to be abolished, which currently has 265,000 supporters.

Last week, EU bosses told Britain they can axe the so-called tampon tax amid fury that the product is classed as a luxury by Brussels.

Ministers avoided a defeat in the Commons by pledging to lobby the European Union to scrap the five per cent VAT on tampons of the UK.

Frans Timmermans, European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker's deputy, said this morning that it would be 'perfectly reasonable' for the tampon tax to go as part of David Cameron's renegotiation deal.

But he added that Britain had never asked for the VAT to be removed from tampons in the past and said EU members too often blamed Brussels for red tape they created themselves.

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theguardian

UK news
Tampon tax: £15m raised to be spent on women's charities

Hannah Ellis-Petersen
331 words
25 November 2015
15:56
The Guardian
GRDN
English
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Announcement by George Osborne during spending review is met with consternation in House of Commons and on Twitter

George Osborne has announced that the £15m of money raised by tax on sanitary products will be spent directly on charities that help women.

Speaking at the spending review, Osborne responded to the recent campaign to abolish the 5% VAT – dubbed the tampon tax – that is levied on women's sanitary products.

The chancellor said that he was committed to changing the EU law that stipulates the tax and said in the meantime that the £15m funds it raises would be directed to women's refuges and domestic abuse charities.

Osborne said: "We already charge the lowest 5% rate allowable under European law and we're committed to getting the EU rules changed. Until that happens, I'm going to use the £15m a year raised from the tampon tax to fund women's health and support charities. The first £5m will be distributed between the Eve Appeal, SafeLives and Women's Aid and the Haven – and I invite bids from other such good causes."

Related: Bridget Christie: feminine products a luxury? Hardly. At least Jeremy Corbyn understands

More than 300,000 people have signed a petition to abolish the tax and the issue was debated in parliament in October, led by the Labour MP Paula Sherriff. Labour reduced VAT on sanitary products from 17.5% to 5% in 2000 but could not go any further under EU rules.

The announcement was met with consternation in the House of Commons, with the Labour MP Jess Phillips reportedly shouting: "You're not paying it, George, I am."

Osborne's announcement also prompted outrage on social media. Many people were angered by the implication that only women should pay to help vulnerable women, arguing that dealing with domestic violence was something that should be tackled by society as whole.

Document GRDN000020151125ebbp0053j

THE TIMES

Business
Token gesture' on abuse angers women

435 words
26 November 2015
The Times
T
1; National
11
English
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TAMPON TAX

The £15 million raised each year from charging VAT on tampons will be ringfenced and used to fund health and domestic abuse proJects for women (Rosemary Bennett writes).

George Osborne said that European Union law prevented him from abolishing the 5 per cent tax on tampons and sanitary towels. Instead the first £5 million will be distributed between the cancer charities Eve Appeal and The Haven and the domestic abuse charities SafeLives and Women's Aid. The chancellor invited bids from other good causes for the rest of the funds. Some 300,000 people had signed a petition against the tax.

Women's groups criticised the chancellor, and in particular his presentation of the change. In his statement he said that it would be "similar to the way" that proceeds of bank fines linked to the manipulation of the global benchmark London inter-bank lending rate were given to charity.

"Comparing #tampontax to #libor implies we have control over our biology," members of the Fawcett Society, a charity for women's equality and rights, said.

There was also outrage that the move implied that women should pay to help vulnerable women. Critics argued that domestic violence should be tackled by society as whole.

"We are concerned that while the chancellor talked extensively about security, he has implemented only token measures to ensure that women are secure in their day-to-day lives. The earmarking of the £15 million revenues from the so-called tampon tax for violence against women's charities is a drop in the pan compared with the cuts these services have suffered since 2010," Polly Trenow, of the umbrella Women's Budget Group, said.

Jenny McComb, the petition organiser, said that the announcement was a victory for the campaign. "I'm delighted that women's charities will benefit from additional funding. As many people have observed, we mustn't let him use this as a smokescreen to hide cuts to local councils and social care," she said.

Word play

For Gordon Brown it was the tax cut that dare not speak its name. When he slashed VAT on tampons and sanitary towels from 17 per cent to 5 per cent in the 2000 budget, not only did he fail to mention the words, he didn't even announce the cut. As a result, it became known as his one and only "stealth tax cut".

In contrast, for George Osborne, who said that money from the "tampon tax" would fund women's health charities, it was an opportunity to burnish his New Man credentials.

Document T000000020151126ebbq000h3

theguardian

Voluntary Sector Network
Tampon tax: men should share the burden of ending domestic abuse

Polly Neate
478 words
26 November 2015
16:50
The Guardian
GRDN
English
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My charity will make sure that we use the funding wisely, but let's not forget that it is everyone's responsibility

Women's Aid is feeling extremely fortunate. The chancellor has just announced that we will be sharing a fund of £2m to work with another domestic abuse charity, SafeLives, to improve early intervention in domestic abuse: something we have long argued is essential.

This work is being funded through the proceeds of the tax on sanitary products. There is good in this, but questions are inevitable and we are glad the government will continue to work to get rid of this tax.

However, we must take every opportunity to loudly and clearly affirm that women alone are not responsible for ending domestic violence.

Related: Should the tampon tax be used to help domestic violence victims? | Rose George and Caroline Criado-Perez

The £2m fund is part of a £15m fund for charities working across the full range of women's services. I hope this will be fantastic news for a sector that has seen disproportionate cuts, and more importantly for women, who have borne the brunt of austerity.

Women have been affected unfairly by public service cuts both as recipients of services and as employees of the public sector, so they certainly need the support this funding will provide. If we must live with the tampon tax for a bit longer, it's great to spend it in this way.

Related: Women's Aid at 40: 'At the time we felt we could change the world' – in pictures

Our early intervention project, set up with SafeLives, called Sooner the Better aims to create communities to bring down the barriers to disclosing abuse. It will make it possible for women to seek help, secure in the knowledge that they will be believed, supported and above all not blamed for the abuse they have experienced. And our initiative is only the start of what that £15m can achieve.

Today of all days, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we must acknowledge that domestic abuse is the fault of the abuser alone, and that it is not up to women alone to end it – through a tax on their periods or by any other means. Today is the day when the public step up and accept that equality is about more than treating women kindly. It is about fundamental cultural and social change.

We will do our best to make sure our work funded by the tampon tax does just that. But let's not forget that ending domestic abuse, and other manifestations of women's inequality, is worth spending men's income tax on.

For more news, opinions and ideas about the voluntary sector, join our community.

Document GRDN000020151125ebbp006bv

Mail Online

Femail

Superdrug pledges to 'give' the tampon tax on sanitary items back to women (but they'll only get points on their loyalty card)

MARTHA CLIFF FOR MAILONLINE
411 words
8 February 2016
19:18
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
Copyright 2016

* Superdrug will return the five per cent VAT to customers from Wednesday

* Purchases of Superdrug's Own Brand tampons will see customers rewarded with loyalty card points on their Health & Beauty Card account

* The retailer says they hope to see the tax removed entirely

As the debate over the 'tampon tax' continues to rage, Superdrug has announced that it will give the extra money women spend back to them.

The high street chain says that from February 10 it will return the five per cent VAT on their own brand tampons and sanitary items.

From 10th February all purchases of Superdrug's Own Brand tampons and sanitary towels in the UK will see the customer rewarded with between three and ten loyalty card points added to their Health & Beauty Card account.

Each of these points represents a penny to spend in store, and represents a penny from the purchase price to offset what is given to the Treasury in VAT.

Currently all purchases of sanitary protection carry a five per cent VAT charge.

A spokesperson for Superdrug said: 'Tampon Tax is in the spotlight in the Palace of Westminster with Chancellor George Osborne promising to give the VAT The Treasury receives to good causes and to lobby the EU to zero rate all sanitary protection.

'While this is good news, and something Superdrug has long supported, we want to do our bit now to ensure that women do not have to pay the so called "luxury tax" on an essential item.'

Gemma Mason, Superdrug Head of Customer Service Experience & Service comments: 'The issue of which items are rated for VAT has always been a contentious issue and we believe that if there is one product area which needs urgently addressing it's sanitary protection.

'As a retailer which has millions of women visiting its stores every week buying tampons and towels we wanted to do something now to give something back.

'We are hopeful that the rules will change in the future, until then we are delighted to give a little back to our customers.'

The Treasury takes around £15million each year from VAT on sanitary protection. Superdrug estimates that it will give over £60,000 back to its Health & Beauty Card members through donation of points this year.

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FT FINANCIAL TIMES

Labour urges Osborne to take action on 'tampon tax'

Jim Pickard and Kate Allen
584 words
15 March 2016
19:40
Financial Times (FT.Com)
FTCOM
English
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George Osborne has been urged to take advantage of new proposals from Brussels to exempt women's sanitary products from VAT and end an ongoing row over the so-called "tampon tax".

Labour said the chancellor no longer had any excuse not to cut VAT on sanitary products from the current rate of 5 per cent to zero.

Mr Osborne has also been under pressure for months from Conservative MPs and Scottish nationalists to end the levy.

At present the UK cannot cut the rate from 5 per cent, the lowest level permitted by EU rules. The VAT rate for most goods in Britain is 20 per cent.

For Eurosceptic members of the Conservative party, this particular tax has become symbolic of the restrictions imposed on the UK by EU membership.

At the same time some Tory MPs are angry that the Treasury was ordered last summer by the European Court of Justice to increase VAT on solar panels and insulation from 5 to 20 per cent.

Some Tory MPs believe the ECJ intervention has undermined Mr Osborne's "tax lock" — his promise that VAT, income tax and National Insurance would not rise this parliament.

The list of "essential" goods that attract no VAT has barely changed since the 1970s: it includes food, incontinence aids, razors and children's clothes.

MPs seeking to exempt women's sanitary products almost defeated the government in a vote over an amendment to the finance bill.

The FT reported this week that Brussels is planning to hand national capitals more power to set their own VAT rates.

Seema Malhotra, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, said that Mr Osborne could reduce the tampon tax to zero as early as 2017.

"Women's sanitary products are not a luxury. George Osborne should take the opportunity in his Budget to say that he will take the action called for by Labour and feminist campaigners and seek to get the tampon tax abolished," she said.

The European Commission said it wanted to overhaul the increasingly "obsolescent" rules on when and how countries can apply lower VAT rates.

VAT is one of the few EU taxes that is significantly centralised, bringing Brussels into frequent conflict over the rates imposed on different products and services.

In recent years there have been clashes in the courts over the appropriate VAT rate for everything from Belgian sex shops to French ebooks.

The Commission has taken enforcement action against more than two-thirds of EU countries for flouting rules on where reduced VAT rates can be applied.

Its paper sets out two options for overhauling the system. The first would retain a list of goods and services eligible for reduced rates, but expand it and open it up to regular review.

The other is to abolish the list and replace it with “rules framing the cases when reduced rates can be applied”, effectively scrapping the standard 15 per cent VAT rate.

At present, there are various exemptions that differ from country to country. British tourists pay no VAT on houseboats while the Netherlands applies a lower rate on bicycles.

Mr Osborne announced in November that £15m from the “tampon tax” would be spent on charities that helped women.

“He should also make it clear that the funding for women’s organisations and domestic violence charities linked to the ‘tampon tax’ will be maintained after a zero rate is achieved,” said Ms Malhotra.

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FT FINANCIAL TIMES

NATIONAL NEWS
Labour urges Osborne to end row over 'tampon tax'; VAT rates

By Jim Pickard and Kate Allen
394 words
16 March 2016
Financial Times
FTFT
London Ed1
02
English
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George Osborne has been urged to take advantage of new proposals from Brussels to exempt women's sanitary products from value added tax and end a row over the so-called tampon tax.

Labour said the chancellor no longer had any excuse not to cut VAT on sanitary products from the current rate of 5 per cent to zero. Mr Osborne has also been under pressure from Tory MPs and Scottish nationalists to end the levy.

At present the UK cannot cut the rate from 5 per cent, the lowest level permitted by EU rules. The VAT rate for most goods in Britain is 20 per cent.

For Eurosceptic members of the Conservative party, this particular tax has become symbolic of the restrictions imposed on the UK by EU membership.

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Some Tory MPs believe the ECJ intervention has undermined Mr Osborne's "tax lock" - his promise that VAT, income tax and National Insurance would not rise this parliament. The list of "essential" goods that attract no VAT has barely changed since the 1970s: it includes food, incontinence aids, razors and children's clothes.

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The European Commission said it wanted to overhaul the increasingly "obsolescent" rules on when and how countries can apply lower VAT rates. VAT is one of the few EU taxes that is centralised, bringing Brussels into frequent conflict over the rates imposed on different products and services.

Document FTFT000020160316ec3g0000f

THE TIMES

News
Tampon tax revolt George Osborne [...]

171 words
17 March 2016
The Times
T
1; Scotland
9
English
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Tampon tax revolt George Osborne is facing a Commons defeat next week over his "tampon tax" plans that have infuriated Tory Eurosceptics and Labour MPs (Sam Coates writes).

The chancellor is likely to be unnerved by the prospect of a defeat to part of the Finance Bill, which enacts the budget.

The 5 per cent VAT on women's sanitary products would raise £12 million for charity but Mr Osborne could face a rebellion by 50 Tory MPs.

Eurosceptics are opposed because the EU blocked MPs from abolishing the tax and have voted against the plan in the past. Labour MPs believe that Mr Osborne should have done more.

A cross-party group led by Paula Sherriff for Labour and Anne-Marie Trevelyan for the Tories have put down an amendment blocking VAT from women's sanitary products.

If they win it will be the first defeat for a finance bill since 1994, when John Major and Ken Clarke lost over VAT on domestic fuel.

Document T000000020160317ec3h000o6

THE TIMES

UK News

Pro-Brexit camp look to embarrass chancellor over 'tampon tax'

Lucy Fisher, Senior Political Correspondent
724 words
17 March 2016
14:02
thetimes.co.uk
TIMEUK
English
© Times Newspapers Limited 2016

George Osborne has attempted to head off a growing Tory revolt over the "tampon tax" that has united Eurosceptics and opposition MPs against the chancellor.

Conservatives backing Brexit are trying to force the chancellor into an embarrassing defeat as they regard the 5 per cent levy on sanitary towels as an example of unwelcome interference by Brussels.

Mr Osborne declared today that Britain is on the verge of a deal with the EU that would allow the government to abolish the VAT that is at present enforced by European rules.

He predicted that he would be able to declare an end to the levy "in the next few days".

Tory MPs have expressed concern, however, that such a deal is far from certain because it requires the agreement of all 28 EU member nations.

Mr Osborne also struck a defensive tone this morning after economists scrutinised his eighth budget overnight. Serious questions were raised about his revised plans to balance the books by 2020 after he unveiled a £56 billion "black hole" in the UK's finances.

MPs from all parties have demanded that the chancellor defy EU rules and scrap the controversial levy on tampons, which has long been criticised by women's rights campaigners as a tax on women

It emerged last night that Tory backbenchers are threatening to join forces with opposition MPs to try to amend the Finance Bill in the Commons on Tuesday to allow the zero-rating of women's sanitary products.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan, the Conservative MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed who is leading the pro-Brexit Women for Britain group, said: "The people we elect should be responsible for setting the taxes in this country – not unelected EU judges and bureaucrats. It is a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation, which is what we now have."

Yesterday Mr Osborne said that the £12 million raised by the levy would go towards women's charities. Today, in an attempt to dampen the prospects of a parliamentary rebellion, he told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "I perfectly understand people's anger at paying the tampon tax.

"I said we would get agreement that we could reduce this rate to zero. I think we are on the verge of getting that agreement. I think we are going to get that agreement in the next few days, we hope."

He added that the move would show Britons that the UK is "a strong voice in the world and we get what we ask for because we're at the top table".

This morning he was forced to play down suggestions that he must find swingeing spending cuts or else impose tax increases to achieve surplus by the end of the decade.

"We have got to hold to the course that we have set out," he told BBC One's Breakfast programme.

"I have set out the plans in the budget and then a completely independent body which everybody respects – the Office for Budget Responsibility – has looked at those plans and it says, 'If you hold to the course, you deliver those plans. If the economy grows as expected, then we will have a surplus towards the end of the parliament'.

"We wouldn't need anything extra like more spending cuts or more tax increases."

Economists accused Mr Osborne of using accountancy tricks in the budget to disguise the scope of savings needed down the line. Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), said the chancellor had made his sums add up by “shuffling money around”.

“Within his very tight rule he will probably get away with this this time round,” he said. “But there’s only about a 50-50 shot that he’s going to get there.

“If things change again, if the OBR downgrades its forecasts again, I don’t think he will be able to get away with anything like this. I think he will be forced to put some proper tax increases in or possibly find some yet further proper spending cuts.

“I think this is going to be the last chance he gets to move things around like this without doing anything genuinely big to the public finances.”

Document TIMEUK0020160317ec3h0008v

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Mail Online

News

Britain faces ANOTHER year of austerity just so George Osborne can juggle the numbers and clear the deficit before the next election spending watchdog warns

TIM SCULTHORPE, MAILONLINE DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR and MATT DATHAN, MAILONLINE POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT
3,723 words
17 March 2016
18:18
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
Copyright 2016

* Chancellor is defending his Budget plans after he missed his targets again

* The IFS today warned his key target of clearing the deficit would not be met

* It warned more tax rises or spending cuts would be needed before 2020

* But Osborne insists he has taken the long term decisions to get it right

* The Budget created a sugar tax, cut middle class taxes and froze fuel duty

* For more of the latest on the 2016 Budget visit www.dailymail.co.uk/budget

George Osborne is planning an extra year of austerity that will push cuts into the next decade to help him clear the deficit as planned, the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned today.

Paul Johnson, the think tank's director, said the forecasts unveiled by the Chancellor in the Budget suggested spending would fall by £10billion in 2020/21.

And he slammed Mr Osborne for 'shuffling' money between tax years in an effort to meet his 'economically irrelevant' goal of a £10billion surplus before the next election.

At a bombshell briefing the day after Mr Osborne's eighth Budget repeated his claim that even if Mr Osborne is not blown off course yet again he still only has a 50/50 chance of hitting his target.

Mr Johnson said: "If the OBR is right about that we should all be worried.

'This will lead to lower wages and living standards, not just lower tax revenues for the Treasury.'

He added: 'In the longer term the public finances are kept on track only by adding yet another year of planned austerity on the spending side.

'Spending in 2020-/21 will be £10bn less than planned.'

Mr Johnson admitted the elimination of the deficit would represent a 'huge turnaround over the decade' in the state of the public finances.

Mr Osborne has been vigorously defending his Budget plans today, insisting hitting his deficit targets would not mean tax hikes or more spending cuts.

But his efforts were not helped when he was caught on camera left empty handed as children refused to pass him the ball.

Mr Osborne, who admits to hating sport when he was a pupil, visited a primary school in West Yorkshire this morning.

As the Chancellor defended his Budget, it emerged:

* The independent Office for Budget Responsibility only rates Mr Osborne's chances of hitting his deficit targets at 55 per cent - but the watchdog's chief said the Chancellor was just about on track.

* Labour claimed Mr Osborne had left a £560million blackhole in the schools budget. The Opposition said converting 15,000 schools would cost more than £700million based on the average conversion cost of £44,837. Mr Osborne announced a £140million plan for the policy.

* Shadow chancellor John McDonnell said he was concerned about the 'fairness' of Mr Osborne's plans and blasted the 'political choices' in the Budget.

* Mr Osborne claimed Britain was 'on the verge' of securing a deal with the EU to end the so-called 'tampon tax' which demands female sanitary products be charged VAT.

* The Chancellor insisted the Budget for helping disabled people was going up overall amid a row over £1.2billion in cuts to disability benefits.

The Chancellor was forced to announce he had missed another crucial economic target yesterday as he has failed to get debt falling.

But in his Budget statement he insisted the public finances were forecast to fall into line by 2020 despite the 'storm clouds' gathering over the economy.

This morning he insisted he would not 'fix the figures' and said he had set out a plan to achieve a Budget surplus of £10billion by the next election.

But the independent Office for Budget Responsibility said Mr Osborne only had a 50/50 chance of making the target, while the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicted more spending cuts and tax rises.

Mr Osborne today told the BBC: 'We have got to hold to the course that we have set out.

'I have set out the plans in the Budget and then a completely independent body which everybody respects - the Office for Budget Responsibility - has looked at those plans and it says, 'If you hold to the course, you deliver those plans.

''If the economy grows as expected, then we will have a surplus towards the end of the parliament'.

'We wouldn't need anything extra like more spending cuts or more tax increases.'

Mr Osborne later insisted the rules only legally applied in 'normal times' - suggesting a further economic downturn which trashed his targets again would not be his fault.

But the Chancellor was challenged repeatedly on why he had failed to meet two of his three targets and the BBC's John Humphrys asked him: 'What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack?'

The Chancellor replied: 'The British people hold me to account, the British people can chuck out governments if they don't like them - that's the great thing about the democracy.

'We said we would turn the country around and it's a much stronger place than it was.'

IFS chief Paul Johnson said Mr Osborne had only been able to make the figures add up by 'shuffling money around'.

He warned that the Chancellor would be forced to find 'genuinely big' tax rises or spending cuts if there was any further downgrade in the public finances.

'Within his very tight rule he will probably get away with this this time round. But there's only about a 50-50 shot that he's going to get there,' he told the Today programme.

'If things change again, if the OBR downgrades its forecasts again, I don't think he will be able to get away with anything like this.

'I think he will be forced to put some proper tax increases in or possibly find some yet further proper spending cuts.

'I think this is going to be the last chance he gets to move things around like this without doing anything genuinely big to the public finances.'

In its report for yesterday's Budget, the OBR said the Government was 'more likely than not' to meet its targets - but it warned this judgement was only by a 'small' margin compared to the risks which could blow it off course.

It said the chance of the planned surplus was only 'slightly above 50 per cent'.

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Shadow chief secretary Seema Malhotra said Mr Osborne was 'struggling to explain how his Budget adds up and admits his failures on productivity'.

John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, slammed the Budget today.

He told the BBC: 'We do not believe that the austerity cuts that this government are bringing forward are necessary or, to be frank, are fair.

OSBORNE CLAIMS HE'S 'ON THE VERGE' OF ENDING THE TAMPON TAX WITH AN EU DEAL

George Osborne has claimed he is 'on the verge' of an EU deal to scrap the tampon tax - but could still face a Commons rebellion from MPs demanding a unilateral move.

EU rules insist the Government cannot add tampons to the list of zero rated products but the Government has committed to try and secure a change.

The Chancellor today insisted he did 'understand' anger at the rules and as an interim measure yesterday announced a string of charities which would benefit from the revenue.

But Labour MP Paula Sherriff said she would press on with a Commons battle to change the rules - and her campaign could be joined by rebellious Brexit supporters on the Tory benches.

Ms Sherriff has tabled amendments to the Finance Bill, which implement the Budget in law, to change UK law without permission from the EU. Her amendments could be struck out if Commons clerks declare they would breach the law.

Mr Osborne today said: 'I said we would get agreement that we could reduce this rate to zero and I think we are on the verge of getting that agreement.'

'Yesterday we made the point that austerity is not an economic necessity it's a political choice and yesterday the Chancellor made his political choices.

'He cut capital gains tax to the richest five per cent of our country and he cut the disability benefits to some of the most vulnerable.

'We would reverse them, it's unacceptable that people with disabilities have to pay for the tax cuts for the rich.'

Yesterday's bad news on the public finances did not stop Mr Osborne announcing a Budget for the 'next generation', which also included a controversial sugar tax to tackle childhood obesity, a lifetime of tax free savings for the young and £1.5billion for education.

A substantial rise in the 40p rate income tax threshold will save middle earners £400 a year.

And 31 million earners across the UK will benefit from a further rise in the personal allowance to £11,500 from next year.

The Chancellor also unveiled a major overhaul of corporation tax that will reduce the headline rate to 17 per cent but close loopholes on multinationals that will raise £9billion.

Small firms will take back about £7billion of the new revenue via reforms to business rates as Mr Osborne promised a 'level playing field' for large and small businesses.

Mr Osborne today defended a £1.2billion cut to disability benefit - described yesterday by Mr McDonnell as 'morally reprehensible'.

The Chancellor said: 'We are increasing the support, increasing the money that is going to disabled people, so that money is going to go up as a budget because we've got to make sure we help the most vulnerable in our society.'

He added: 'We've got to make sure we control our disability budget so that as it rises – and I stress this point – as it rises it absolutely goes to the people in our society who need it most.'

Tory MP Andrew Percy today signalled at Tory unease over the cuts as he suggested a rise in fuel duty would have been a price worth paying to protect the disability element in the personal independence payments (PIP).

He said: 'If I can be honest, I'd rather have a penny or two on fuel if it protects PIP. A point a made in weeks running up to budget.

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'The reason I say that is because I do feel if opposing something, we should also identify where else it could be funded from.'

In other developments today, Office for Budget Responsibility chairman Robert Chote undermined Mr Osborne's implication his watchdog had warned against a Brexit vote.

Mr Chote told The Daily Telegraph: 'We are reporting on the weight of views that are expressed outside, we are not saying that we endorse any quantitative estimate and we are very definitely not taking a view on the long-term consequences of In versus Out.'

He added: 'We are not attempting to quantify what the impact of the No vote will be – leaving aside the longer-term issues.

'We just thought it was sensible to recognise the fact that this is a risk – lots of other people are talking about it, they are making attempts to quantify it but we did not want to put our imprimatur on any particular estimate.'

What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack? Osborne is forced to defend himself after missing TWO of his key targets

George Osborne had to admit the voters could chuck him out over his missed economic targets today after he was asked what would get him the sack.

Revealing grim public finances yesterday, Mr Osborne admitted he was failing to get the debt down as a share of GDP - the second failure after he broke his own cap on welfare spending in November.

Mr Osborne's third target - to have cleared the deficit and be running a surplus by the end of the decade - is in the balance, independent spending watchdogs have warned.

The Chancellor was grilled repeatedly on the missed targets on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme today.

After trying the question several times, exasperated presenter John Humphrys asked him: 'What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack?'

The Chancellor replied: 'The British people hold me to account, the British people can chuck out governments if they don't like them - that's the great thing about the democracy.

'We said we would turn the country around and it's a much stronger place than it was.'

Mr Osborne had been defending his plans and the adjustments made in the face of economic challenges - insisting he was the first Chancellor to hold himself to independent standards.

He said: 'I've made adjustments to my plans to make sure debt does fall as a proportion of national income in the coming year; I've made adjustments to my plans to make sure we are going to live within our means and get that surplus.

On welfare spending, yes, I'm the first Chancellor ever to say let's look at what we spend on welfare, let's take action to try and keep within the cap we set.'

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn highlighted Mr Osborne's missed targets when he responded to the Budget in the Commons yesterday.

He said: 'Over the past six years the Chancellor's set targets on deficit, on debt, on productivity, on manufacturing and construction, on exports. He's failed in all of them and he's failing this country.'

George Osborne plans teacher training overhaul to hand more power to headmasters but he faces claims of a £560MILLION black hole in the education budget

Teachers will spend more time in the classroom as part of their training in a major overhaul of how they qualify under radical plans announced by the Government today.

Ministers will scrap the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and replace it with a stronger accreditation process that will be led and assessed by schools.

It will aim to give teachers the same status as doctors and lawyers whereby schools will decide when they are 'fully functioning' teachers.

Headteachers will be given greater powers and will be able to bring in people from other professions under the plans that come a day after George Osborne used his Budget to announce a range of education reforms.

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The Chancellor said this morning that reforms to the teacher profession were needed to give children 'a world-class schooling'.

It comes a day after he dedicated his eighth Budget to 'put the next generation first' but he faces claims he has a £560million black hole in his plans to convert all state schools into academies.

The Chancellor announced £140million would go towards funding the pledge but analysis of how much it will cost to convert England's 15,632 remaining state schools into academies has found that the money pledged yesterday will only cover a quarter of the conversion.

Today's announcement will deliver a major shake-up of teacher qualifications and will give headteachers greater power over their workforce, giving them freedom to bring in people from other professions to teach pupils.

The overhaul of teacher training will be included alongside other announcements made this week on converting all schools into academies and extending school days past 3.30pm in a blueprint for reforming England's school system.

Nicky Morgan, the Education Secretary, will introduce the plans to Parliament today.

She says they will improve standards in teaching and to 'create a fundamentally different education system - an education system fit for the 21st century'.

The QTS will not be replaced with another uniform qualification but instead puts the responsibility for deciding when a teacher qualifies in the hands of schools.

A teacher's school will decide when they are ready to fully qualify and that decision will be reviewed by another school in a peer-led process that mirrors the process of qualification in other professions, such as lawyers.

But it risks reopening the fight that former Education Secretary Michael Gove faced with teacher unions when he introduced plans to allow academies to employ people with no formal teaching qualifications.

He caused outrage with education professionals after allowing schools to hire professionals such as scientists, engineers, musicians and linguists to teach even if they did not have the QTS.

Speaking on a visit to a primary school in West Yorkshire this morning, Mr Osborne said: 'We are announcing today further improvements to our education so that the kids in our country get a world-class schooling.

'So we are going to be changing some of the ways we qualify teachers so that they spend more time in the classroom - above all so that they are recognised for the great profession they are, in the same way for example that doctors are.

'I think it's going to be a welcome improvement in support and training we give to our teaching profession.'

But he was forced to defend an apparent shortfall in the amount of money he has pledged towards 'full academisation' of England's schools.

The average cost of transferring a school to an academy is £45,000 - meaning the whole project will cost £700million.

With just £140million put aside for the academy conversion, it leaves a £560million shortfall.

Labour has warned that the black hole will leave Mr Osborne with no option but to raid the budget for a much-needed increase in school places.

Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell said: 'The Chancellor's plans for education are unravelling.

'Schools are already facing an eight per cent cut to their budgets, the first time education spending has fallen since the mid-1990s.

'This half a billion pound black hole in the education budget means that schools will be further out of pocket as a result. The Chancellor needs to come clean about where this money is going to come from.'

Tory MPs rally a rebellion against Osborne's £1.2billion slashing of disability benefits - and one even suggests raising fuel duty to cover the cost

George Osborne faced growing Tory dissent over his cuts to disability benefit today as a letter circulated urging him to change course.

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In an echo of the damaging row over tax credits last year, Brigg and Goole MP Andrew Percy said higher petrol duty would have been a price worth paying to protect vulnerable people.

The Chancellor confirmed the cuts in yesterday's benefit and today insisted it was to ensure the disability budget was spent helping the most needy.

Mr Osborne said the overall budget for supporting disabled people was rising.

No 10 today pointed to a study which showed 96 per cent of disabled people who need support would be better served by one off payments instead of a weekly allowance.

Tory MP Andrew Percy today signalled at Tory unease over the cuts as he suggested a rise in fuel duty would have been a price worth paying to protect the disability element in the personal independence payments (PIP).

He said: 'If I can be honest, I'd rather have a penny or two on fuel if it protects PIP. A point a made in weeks running up to budget.

'The reason I say that is because I do feel if opposing something, we should also identify where else it could be funded from.'

He later told the BBC: 'The way in which this has been presented for one and the way in which this is a catch-all and is really more about the welfare cap than about welfare reform means that this hits exactly the wrong people potentially.

'I think it sends out the wrong message about the priorities of the Government.'

Mr Percy continued: 'There are some changes within the whole package that you can argue that about, but the fact is the package as a whole goes too far.

"I think the savings that it makes are not appropriate and I don't think can be justified so it's just not acceptable now.'

Shadow chancellor John McDonnell yesterday dubbed the cuts as 'morally reprehensible' and shadow work and pensions work and pensions secretary Owen Smith today continued the attack.

He said: 'The truth is the Tories have targeted thirty billion pounds worth of cuts on disabled people since 2010.

'These latest cuts, hitting those who need help managing toilet needs and getting dressed, are beyond cruel'.

Asked on BBC Breakfast about whether cuts to PIP were harming the most vulnerable in society, Mr Osborne said: 'We have got to make sure we have a system that works.

'I'm always happy to listen to proposals about how improve on that but we have got to control our disability budget and make sure help goes to the people who need it most.'

Mr Osborne added: ' 'We are increasing the support, increasing the money that is going to disabled people, so that money is going to go up as a budget because we've got to make sure we help the most vulnerable in our society.'

He added: 'We've got to make sure we control our disability budget so that as it rises – and I stress this point – as it rises it absolutely goes to the people in our society who need it most.'

The Prime Minister's official spokeswoman added: 'The Government are clear on why we are proposing these changes.

'Spending on main disability benefits has gone up and we don't think the personal independence payment is working as well as it could at making sure the money that is going into this is being focused on the right people.'

She added: 'Health professionals were asked to review cases where people qualified for personal independence payments based on the need for aid and applicances for their disability.

'What they found was in 96% of cases they were unlikely to have ongoing extra costs - so for example they might have needed to have a hand toilet rail fitted in their home.

'Once that was completed they were unlikely to need significant extra costs over a sustained period that would justify a weekly allowance.'

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FT FINANCIAL TIMES

British officials claim victory over Brussels in ‘tampon tax’ row

Jim Brunsden and Jim Pickard
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As the rest of Europe debated a deal with Turkey to accept the return of thousands of refugees flooding into Greece, British officials in Brussels claimed victory over something completely different — the so-called tampon tax.

David Cameron, the UK prime minister, was able to secure a declaration from his fellow leaders welcoming plans from the European Commission to liberalise value added tax rules so he can end a levy on tampons and other feminine sanitary products.

In what EU diplomats believe is the first reference to the products in a formal EU summit communiqué, the wording agreed by all 28 leaders makes specific reference to how the new VAT regime would “provide the option to member states of zero [VAT] rating sanitary products”.

The commission’s VAT proposals, reported by the FT last week, are a priority for Mr Cameron, who is facing a backbench rebellion over the 5 per cent VAT rate levied on tampons. The rate cannot be lowered without agreement from the EU.

Although the UK demands produced bemusement in other EU delegations, George Osborne, the British chancellor, made clear how important the issue was to Downing Street by issuing an official statement hailing the wording — even though it only welcomed a proposal the commission had already signalled it was about to propose.

“We said we’d fight for agreement to reduce the VAT rate to zero and tonight all European leaders have welcomed our plan to do just that,” Mr Osborne said. “We’ve achieved what no British government has even tried to achieve.”

The commission proposal, in practice an options paper, would set out ideas for reforming rules in the EU whereby VAT rates of less than 15 per cent can only be applied to a limited list of core products and services. The limitations of the list have been the source of endless spats between EU nations, as well as between governments and the commission, which is obliged to uphold the rules. The current system restricts when zero VAT rates can be applied.

In a recent case, France and Luxembourg clashed with the commission over the extension of ultra-low rates for books to ebooks. They were defeated in the courts last year because of an EU ban on reducing rates for “electronically supplied services”. The restrictions of the current system have also prevented the UK from applying a VAT rate to tampons of less than 5 per cent.

In the most radical option in the commission paper, the list would be scrapped, along with the standard 15 per cent rate, giving nations “greater freedom on the number of reduced rates and their level”.

While the backing of EU leaders for change was hailed as a victory by British officials, in practice there is a long way to go before the rules are changed. The commission plans, due to be published next week, must be followed by legislation to take effect. Any changes to the system would require unanimous support by EU nations.

Mr Cameron’s move at the summit was an attempt to head off a rebellion by an unlikely alliance of leftwing parties and Eurosceptic backbenchers from Mr Cameron’s Tory party.

In October an amendment to the government’s finance bill — which would have forced a negotiation with the EU for a reduction in the 5 per cent VAT rate — was only narrowly defeated in parliament, 305-287.

Mr Osborne subsequently sought to quell dissent by promising to give the proceeds of VAT on women's sanitary products to various charities.

But Conservative MPs have been planning a fresh ambush next Tuesday by joining up again with Labour and the Scottish National party to try to force Mr Osborne's hand. They view the seemingly esoteric "tampon tax" as a symbol of Brussels tyranny over the UK.

Defeat on the amendment would be a historic humiliation: the last time a government was defeated on its finance bill was two decades ago.

Simultaneously another rebellion is brewing over the VAT rate on solar panels — which is also set to come to a head next week.

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theguardian

Politics
Budget 2016: Osborne's policies help the rich and hurt the poor, says thinktank - Politics live

Andrew Sparrow
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17 March 2016
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English
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Rolling coverage of all the day's political developments as they happen, including George Osborne 's morning interviews and the Institute for Fiscal Studies ' briefing on the budgetGeorge Osborne's morning interviews - SummaryJohn McDonnell's morning interviews - SummaryResolution Foundation says Osborne's policies will help rich and hurt poorInstitute for Fiscal Studies budget briefing - SummaryAfternoon summary

block-time published-time 4.06pm GMT

Afternoon summary

* The Institute for Fiscal Studies has criticised George Osborne for a misleading budget pledge to help Britain's lowest paid workers, and warned that the chancellor's new soft drinks tax could backfire by raising sugar consumption.

As Katie Allen reports, the respected thinktank used its closely watched post-budget analysis to highlight "disingenuousness" in Osborne's claims he was taking the lowest paid "out of tax". It also warned that Osborne had only a 50/50 chance of meeting his goal to put the public finances in surplus by the end of the decade, and attacked a decision to freeze fuel duty for a sixth year running.

* The Conservative MP Andrew Percy has said that a "significant number" of his backbench colleagues are opposed to plans for a £1.3bn cut in disability benefits. As the Press Association reports, he said that the squeeze on personal independence payments (PIPs) sent out the wrong message and that he has organised a letter to the chancellor from concerned backbenchers urging a rethink. Speaking on the World at One he said

It is not about welfare reform or necessarily wholly about getting better value for money. This is about the welfare cap...

The government has a very small majority so you don't need very many for this to be a problem of parliamentary arithmetic. It is fair to say the numbers on this who have expressed concern are very significant indeed.

He also posted about this on Twitter .

enltrMy name appears to be out there on disability benefit changes so let me me clarify. My concern relates to Personal Independence Payments...

— Andrew Percy (@andrewpercy) March 17, 2016 enltr... these are still out to consultation and as part of that I've made clear I dont think they are acceptable. Different to recent ESA change

— Andrew Percy (@andrewpercy) March 17, 2016 enltrIf I can be honest, I'd rather have a penny or two on fuel if it protects PIP. A point a made in weeks running up to budget

— Andrew Percy (@andrewpercy) March 17, 2016 enltrThe reason I say that is because I do feel if opposing something, we should also identify where else it could be funded from

— Andrew Percy (@andrewpercy) March 17, 2016

* George Osborne's latest tax cuts for the wealthy will leave him with a Herculean task of reducing borrowing by £32bn to meet his budget surplus rule in 2019-20, according to the Resolution Foundation.

* David Cameron is to lobby EU leaders and the European commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, at a summit in Brussels on Thursday and Friday to allow the UK to strike down VAT on women's sanitary products.

* Cameron has said that Britain will not be taking any extra migrants as a result of a deal being struck between the European Union and Turkey. He was speaking as he arrived at an EU summit in Brussels.

* The Bank of England has kept the UK base interest rate at its historic low of 0.5% despite a steep fall in the value of sterling linked to the EU referendum, which policymakers said was likely to exert upward pressure on inflation.

* Parent governors are to be scrapped from school governing bodies in favour of professionals with the "right skills", the government has announced.

* Stephen Crabb, the Welsh secretary, has said paedophiles involved in abusing children in care who believe they are "untouchable" should be "looking over their shoulder". In a statement to MPs he said successes by an ongoing criminal investigation into recent allegations of historical abuse in the North Wales care system shows offenders can be tracked down. He said that Operation Pallial, led by the National Crime Agency (NCA), has seen seven men convicted while 102 complaints are being investigated, with a total of 51 men or women arrested or interviewed under caution. A further eight people have been acquitted after a jury trial, Crabb added.

That's all from me for today.

Thanks for the comments.

block-time published-time 3.23pm GMT

And here are two more charts from the IFS's distributional impact analysis (pdf).

This one shows the impact of all tax and benefit changes since the election, by income decile.

Distributional impact assessment of all tax and benefit changes since the election Photograph: IFS And this one shows the impact of all tax and benefit changes since the election, by household type.

Working-age families with children in the second poorest decile do worse. They are set to lose 12% of their net income.

Distributional impact of tax and benefit changes since the election Photograph: IFS block-time published-time 2.58pm GMT

The IFS briefing is now over.

The final question was about the distributional analysis. (See 2.45pm.) Paul Johnson was asked to confirm the the rich gained most from yesterday's budget measures.

He agreed that they did - although he said that, compared to the way other budgets have affected income, the effect was rather small. Although the rich gained most, their income only went up by about 0.2%, he said.

If you looked at a chart which covered the period from 2010 to 2020, you would not be able to see what happened yesterday on the chart [because] it was so small. But given what did happen, as you can see on that chart, the biggest gainers were those towards the top of the income distribution, with most towards the bottom broadly unaffected.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.14pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.45pm GMT

IFS says the wealthy do best from Osborne's budget measures Here is the key chart from the IFS's distributional analysis. It shows the long-term impact of the tax and benefit reforms in yesterday's budget.

It shows the richest 20% of people are doing best, both in cash terms and as a proportion of income.

To be more precise, in proportional terms (ie, as a proportion of net income) those in the second richest decile (the ninth) do best (look at the white line), closely followed by the wealthiest decile. Both groups are well ahead of the group that does third best (the third richest decile).

In cash terms, the richest decile does best, followed by the second richest decile, followed by the third richest decile.

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Distributional impact of budget announcements Photograph: IFS block-time published-time 2.35pm GMT

The IFS has now published its distributional impact analysis of the budget (pdf).

block-time published-time 2.31pm GMT

Q: Can you say more about the extra year of austerity? I must have missed it when the chancellor mentioned it yesterday.

Johnson says, because the economy is doing less well, the government will have to spend less.

block-time published-time 2.27pm GMT

All the IFS presentations are over. Paul Johnson and his team are now taking questions.

Q: Why have you not done a distributional impact assessment?

Stuart Adam says the usual charts will be published on the IFS's website.

Johnson says they were not included in this presentation because the changes were relatively small. But high earners did best from yesterday's measures, he says.

block-time published-time 2.24pm GMT

More from the briefing.

enltrIFS says 370,000 disabled people will lose an average of £3,500 a year thanks to PIP cuts

— John Ashmore (@smashmorePH) March 17, 2016 enltrBut IFS also points out that spending on disability benefits has "almost quadrupled" in the last 20 years

— John Ashmore (@smashmorePH) March 17, 2016 block-time published-time 2.23pm GMT

IFS says lifetime ISA policy could turn out to be 'very expensive' At the IFS briefing Stuart Adam has also said that the lifetime ISA could turn out to be "very expensive".

enltrIFS says people will transfer savings into Lifetime ISAs to get the £1k a-year top-up. "This could potentially be a very expensive policy."

— Jack Blanchard (@Jack_Blanchard_) March 17, 2016 We wrote more about why this was likely to be the case on our budget blog yesterday. We wrote more about why this was likely to be the case

block-time published-time 2.18pm GMT

IFS says increasing tax allowance is 'a giveaway to the better off' Stuart Adam is currently giving a presentation at the IFS briefing about the distributional impact of the budget.

I will post the key charts as soon as they are available, but he has said that increasing the income tax threshold is "very much a giveaway to the better off".

enltr"This is very much a giveaway to the better off" - IFS on raising the personal allowance

— John Ashmore (@smashmorePH) March 17, 2016 enltrIFS says 43% of workers now do not earn enough to pay income tax. So raising threshold further "is very much a giveaway to the better-off"

— Jack Blanchard (@Jack_Blanchard_) March 17, 2016 block-time published-time 2.13pm GMT

This IFS chart shows how the number of higher rate taxpayers is expected to rise.

enltrNumber of higher- and additional-rate taxpayers #Budget2016 - https://t.co/7NXZwCsv08 - pic.twitter.com/jBdkpzSGrO -

— IFS (@TheIFS) March 17, 2016 block-time published-time 2.04pm GMT

The IFS briefing is still going on. Kate Smith has just finished a detailed presentation on the sugar tax (pdf).

Here is a graph that illustrates the point Paul Johnson was making about the sugar tax being irrational, because there is not a standard rate per gram of sugar.

How sugar tax works Photograph: IFS block-time published-time 1.51pm GMT

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Paul Johnson's budget briefing - Summary Here are the main points from the opening statement from Paul Johnson, director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies .

* Johnson said austerity was being extended for another year.

In the longer term the public finances are kept on track only by adding yet another year of planned austerity on the spending side. Spending in 2020- 21 will be £10 billion less than planned...

On these forecasts the Chancellor has now effectively lost the scope to raise public service spending in 2020-21. The OBR has day-to-day spending by central government on public services flat that year, therefore falling as a fraction of national income. Yet another year of austerity pencilled in.

* He accused George Osborne of being “disingenuous” about his tax cuts.

The disingenuousness of the rhetoric on the personal allowance continues. The chancellor boasted yesterday that the increase in it “means another 1.3 million of the lowest paid workers taken out of tax altogether”. No it does not mean that. Taken out of income tax, yes. But not taken out of direct taxes on income. It remains the case that National Insurance Contributions, which are just another tax on earnings, start to be paid once earnings rise above about £8,000.

* He said lower productivity growth could lead to Britain being poorer in the future.

If the OBR is right about [productivity growing more slowly in the future than expected] that we should all be worried. This will lead to lower wages and living standards, not just lower tax revenues for the Treasury.

* He said the sugar tax could lead to the consumption of sugary foods going up.

Only around 17% of added sugar consumed comes from soft drinks – though the proportion in households with children is a little higher. Obviously the soft drinks tax won’t have any impact on the other 80+% of sugar consumption – indeed it might increase it as people move away from soft drinks to other sugary products.

* He said the construction of the sugar tax was illogical.

Tax will be levied at zero pence per gram of sugar for drinks containing 4g of sugar per 100ml, at 35p per 100g of sugar for drinks containing 5g per 100ml, falling to less than 15p per 100g for the most sugary drinks. It’s hard to see the rationale for that.

* He said Osborne had frozen alcohol duty on the drinks most associated with problem drinking.

While duty on wine rose in line with inflation yesterday, duty on beer, spirits and cider was frozen. Spirits and strong cider are the tipples of choice among the heaviest drinkers. Their preference for strong cider at least is largely down to the fact that it bears much lower tax per unit alcohol than any other drink.

* He said one of Osborne’s claim about alcohol duty was “nonsense”.

In a bizarre aside Mr Osborne linked freezing spirits duty to the importance of whisky exports. Duties are not paid on exports. This is rhetorical nonsense.

* He said there was something “rather odd” about the calculations Osborne had used to get his budget forecast into surplus by 2019-20.

* He said Osborne was “running out of wriggle room” in terms of trying to ensure the gets the budget into surplus by the end of the decade.

The problem for the Chancellor though is perhaps less that some of these changes were made, and more that he is running out of wriggle room. His chances of him having a surplus in 2019–20 are only just the right side of 50:50.

* He said that if the public finances deteriorate again, spending will have to be cut or taxes put up.

If there was another downgrade in fiscal forecasts of a similar magnitude and the Chancellor did wish to remain on course to deliver a budget surplus in 2019–20 then this would surely require more real policy change – presumably incorporating at least some permanent tax rises and specific spending cuts. Given the chancellor’s objectives, that would be the appropriate response.

* He said the chancellor’s refusal to increase fuel duty should be “a big worry” for the Treasury.

After six years of freezes (i.e. cuts in real terms) one must begin to wonder whether these duties will ever rise again, especially given current low oil prices. Real duties are now back at levels not seen since the mid

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1990s. Add in the effects of improved efficiency and the cost of a driving a mile in a new car is now at easily its lowest level since then. Given that fuel duties bring in a handy £28 billion a year this has to be a big worry for the Treasury. Given that the harm created by driving in terms of increased congestion is rising, as is the harm from carbon emissions created by using petrol, we might also be worried by the economic and environmental cost of continuing with this policy.

Paul Johnson Photograph: IFS block-time published-time 1.32pm GMT

Gemma Tetlow is now making a presentation about the public finances.

block-time published-time 1.23pm GMT

Here is the full text of Paul Johnson's opening comments (pdf).

block-time published-time 1.23pm GMT

Johnson says Osborne raised capital gains tax in 2010, and cut it yesterday.

He is the latest in a long line of chancellors who do not know what do to about it, he says.

block-time published-time 1.22pm GMT

The Mirror has been quick - it's got a story up about the IFS briefing already.

block-time published-time 1.20pm GMT

Johnson says his increase in the basic rate personal allowance is taking workers out of tax.

But that is wrong, Johnson says. These workers are still paying national insurance.

block-time published-time 1.19pm GMT

Johnson says the cost of driving a mile in a new car is easily at its lowest level for 20 years.

He says if the Treasury cannot raise fuel duty now, when can it raise them. That could create potential problems for the public finances, as well as for climate change, he says.

block-time published-time 1.18pm GMT

Johnson says he does not know why Osborne pretends cutting whisky duty will help exports, because duty is not paid on exports.

block-time published-time 1.17pm GMT

Johnson says the "underlying rationale" of the way the sugar tax is constructed is hard to see.

block-time published-time 1.17pm GMT

IFS says sugar tax could lead to people consuming more sugary foods Johnson says less than one fifth of total sugar consumption comes from sugary drinks. The sugar tax will not have any effect on this other 80% of sugar consumption. It could even increase it, he says.

* IFS says sugar tax could lead to people consuming more sugary foods.

block-time published-time 1.15pm GMT

Johnson says the cut in corporation tax is more evidence of the government's desire to want to make the UK a desirable location for multinational companies.

Overall, the change to corporation tax has been substantial, he says.

block-time published-time 1.14pm GMT

enltrIFS head Paul Johnson is reiterating 50-50 chance of Osborne getting finances into surplus by end of decade.

— Katie Allen (@KatieAllenGdn) March 17, 2016 block-time published-time 1.11pm GMT

Johnson says Osborne has been able to keep within his surplus rule by shifting spending.

The focus on 2019 is obvious in the numbers, he says.

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block-time published-time 1.09pm GMT

Johnson says Osborne has broken his welfare cap rule, and his debt rule. The surplus rule is the only one still standing, he says.

block-time published-time 1.08pm GMT

Johnson says the sugar tax is the first new “sin” tax for quite some time.

enltrIFS says sugar tax won't have any impact on 80% of sugar consumption

— James Landale (@BBCJLandale) March 17, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.11pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.08pm GMT

IFS says Osborne now expects austerity to extend for another year, to 2020-21 Johnson says Osborne has now “found” efficiency savings of £3bn that he did not find in November.

And he says austerity has been extended.

* IFS says Osborne now expects austerity to extend for another year, to 2020-21. Spending that year now due to be £10bn less than planned.

block-time published-time 1.06pm GMT

IFS briefing on the budget Paul Johnson, the IFS director, is starting the IFS briefing.

You can watch it here.

He says the £27bn that the OBR found down the back of the sofa in November turned into a £56bn loss.

That is mainly because of assumptions the OBR made about future productivity growth, he says.

That was probably the most important thing the OBR said.

* IFS says fall in estimate of productivity growth could be most important announcement in budget.

block-time published-time 12.54pm GMT

The Institute for Fiscal Studies ’ briefing on the budget is due to start at 1pm.

You should be able to watch it on a live stream here.

I will be covering it in detail.

block-time published-time 12.51pm GMT

Earlier I mentioned the Daily Mail’s take on the budget and its interest in Theresa May ’s breasts. (See 9.23am.) Laura Bates has now written about this for Comment is Free (or Opinion, as we now call it.)

Related: So Theresa May has breasts – who knew? | Laura Bates

Here’s here conclusion.

We can only continue to speculate over how long it will be before women are able to participate in political processes without parts of their bodies being considered more important than the words coming out of their mouths.

Of course, in brighter news, there was one occasion on which an MP stood up to raise precisely these issues in Westminster itself, when Caroline Lucas rose in a “No more Page 3” T-shirt to discuss the objectification of women in the public sphere. The outcome? She was asked to cover up .

block-time published-time 12.44pm GMT

The Tories have responded to Lucy Powell’s claim about there being a £560m black hole in the government’s plans to turn all English schools into academies (see 12.22pm) , it is reported at PoliticsHome. A Conservative spokesperson said:

These back of the fag-packet estimates are way off the mark. They neglect the significant funding earmarked for academisation at the spending review and make totally inaccurate assumptions about the cost of converting schools to academy status.”

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The chancellor's budget yesterday ensured that the department is fully funded to support the additional costs of delivering a fully-academised school system. The Labour party's shoddy calculations show we are right to look into improving the teaching of maths to 18.

block-time published-time 12.37pm GMT

My colleague Tom Clark has an interesting theory about George Osborne 's budget. He thinks Osborne may be preparing for an early election.

The plan is for a pretty significant loosening of the purse strings, reaching nearly £8bn by the middle of this parliament, and then a seriously sharp contraction – of £14bn – in the immediate run-up to the general election. Vague future cuts would become concrete and specific, and higher taxes would start to bite just before the British public were due to have the scheduled say on their government.

I use the word "scheduled" advisedly, because this bizarre upending of the regular rules of the political cycle begins to make sense only if the chancellor had in mind a rather earlier date with the voters. Let us imagine, for example, that he envisaged a new Conservative leader taking over from David Cameron – who has already promised to go before polling day – some time about 2017, and then doing what Gordon Brown – who has already promised to go before polling day – some time about 2017, and then doing what failed to do in 2007 , and heading to the country with a confident cry that a new leader required a new mandate.

Even before the budget, there were reasons to imagine that this might be the plan. There is a happy historical precedent – Anthony Eden went to the country after taking over from the ailing Winston Churchill in 1955 , and increased his majority – as well as the unhappy contemporary case of Brown bottling it. The opposition is currently hopelessly divided, with Labour's radical Corbynite membership and a middle of the road parliamentary party so preoccupied with fighting each other that the Conservatives might enjoy a clear run in a national race. Labour's struggle is unlikely to be settled decisively in the next year or two, but after that things get harder to call, and the opposition could potentially become more of a threat.

What about the Fixed-term Parliaments Act, you ask. Well, as Tom points out, there are ways around that. He explains that in his article. You can read it in full here.

Related: George Osborne's budget shows he is planning an early election | Tom Clark

block-time published-time 12.27pm GMT

In the Commons John McDonnell has just quoted what Robert Chote, the head of the Office for Budget Responsibility , told Newsnight last night. Chote said that global factors were not primarily to blame for the deteriorating public finances since last autumn; the problem was mainly due to weaker-than-expected domestic economic activity.

block-time published-time 12.22pm GMT

Labour says government's academy plans leave a £560m black hole in school budgets Lucy Powell, the shadow education secretary, claims that there is a £560m black hole in the government's education plans. It wants all schools in England to become academies. According to Labour, 15,632 schools in England are not yet academies and on average converting to academy status costs £44,837. But the government has just set aside £140m for academisation, leaving a shortfall of £560m, Powell said. She went on:

The chancellor's plans for education are unravelling. Schools are already facing an eight per cent cut to their budgets, the first time education spending has fallen since the mid-1990s. This half a billion pound black hole in the education budget means that schools will be further out of pocket as a result.

block-time published-time 12.15pm GMT

John McDonnell opens budget debate John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, is opening today's budget debate.

He started by saying that the budget was "an admission of abject failure by the chancellor". Since becoming chancellor, George Osborne has "missed every major target he has set himself", McDonnell said.

John McDonnell Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 11.47am GMT

Richest households gain £225 from Osborne's income tax cuts - and the poorest just £10, thinktank says Here are the key points from the Resolution Foundation's budget analysis (pdf).

* The Resolution Foundation says the richest 20% of households will gain £225 on average from the income tax cuts announced yesterday, while the poorest 20% will get just £10 on average.

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Distributional impact of income tax changes in yesterday's budget Photograph: Resolution Foundation

* It says by 2020 the poorest 20% of households will lose an average of £550 from the tax and benefit changes announced since the election, while the richest 20% will gain £250.

Distributional impact of tax and benefit changes since election by 2020 Photograph: Resolution Foundation
Alternative figures show that the poorest half of households will lose £375 by 2020, while the richest will gain £235, from all Osborne's post-election policies.

Taking a longer view, the latest income tax changes further skew the distributional impact of policies announced since the 2015 election. After accounting both for previous announcements (relating to the National Living Wage, benefit freezes and cuts to Universal Credit and the tax credit system) and for those from the Budget that we can reasonably model (including the income tax threshold changes, a further reduction in the rate of Capital Gains Tax from next month and another freeze in the fuel duty) we find that households in the bottom half of the income distribution face being worse off in 2020-21 than they would have been in the absence of any policy changes.

We estimate their average loss to be £375 (or 1.8 per cent of their net income). In contrast, we estimate average gains of £235 (or 0.5 per cent of their net income) among households in the top half.

* It says the £2.5bn tax cuts announced yesterday "cannot be justified".

* It says the Conservative's manifesto commitment to raise the basic rate tax allowance to £12,500, and the higher rate threshold to £50,000, by 2020 will cost another £2.5bn, with a third of the gains going to the richest 10%.

The scale of cash consolidation needed in this pre-election year will be made even tougher by the commitment to raise the Personal Tax Allowance (PTA) to £12,500 and Higher Rate Threshold (HRT) to £50,000 by the end of the parliament. The foundation estimates that these tax cuts will cost a further £2.5bn by 2020-21, with a third of the gains going to the richest ten per cent of households.

* It says that the government will have to raise taxes or cut spending by £32bn in 2019 - and that it is very hard to imagine this actually happening before an election. This is from Matt Whittaker, the Resolution Foundation's chief economist:

However by increasing spending through expensive and poorly targeted tax cuts, the chancellor has created a herculean task of reducing borrowing by £32bn in a pre-election year. It is hard to see a government seeking to build a pre-election feelgood factor delivering a consolidation comparable to that seen during the Chancellor's first two years in office.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.54am GMT

block-time published-time 11.27am GMT

Here is the Resolution Foundation's 22-page budget analysis in full (pdf).

I will post more on it shortly.

block-time published-time 11.13am GMT

Osborne will have to raise taxes or cut spending by £32bn in 2019, says thinktank George Osborne's latest tax cuts for the wealthy will leave him with a "Herculean task" of reducing borrowing by £32bn to meet his budget surplus rule in 2019-20, according to the Resolution Foundation.

A string of giveaways in the next couple of years will increase government borrowing above his previous forecasts and force him to find £32bn of tax rises and spending cuts in the last year of the parliament.

The thinktank said the decision to offer tax cuts to wealthier groups in the form of higher tax thresholds and lower capital gains tax was "misguided" when official forecasts showed there was a £56bn black hole in the government's finances .

"By increasing spending through expensive and poorly targeted tax cuts, the chancellor has created a Herculean task of reducing borrowing by £32bn in a pre-election year. It is hard to see a government seeking to build a pre-election feelgood factor delivering a consolidation comparable to that seen during the chancellor's first two years in office.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.48am GMT

block-time published-time 11.07am GMT

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Labour and the Tories have agreed a deal over Short money cuts, Bryant indicates Ministers seem to have backed down on the plans to slash “Short money”, the money that goes to opposition parties to fund their work in parliament.

The original plans generated furious protests when they were published last month.

In a joint response to the government’s consultation the opposition parties offered to accept some changes that would cut the amount spent on Short money, but opposed the initial plan that would have seen Labour losing £1.3m immediately.

In business questions Chris Bryant, the shadow leader of the Commons, indicated that a deal had been done. Responding to the news that MPs will vote on changes next Wednesday he said:

Our usual channel discussions have been very productive and I thank the leader for the part that he has played in them. I’m hopeful that the House will be able to welcome the package when it is finally published.

Chris Bryant Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 10.48am GMT

My colleague Roy Greenslade has posted a good blog with a round-up of the Fleet Street reaction to George Osborne ’s budget.

Related: A tart reaction by newspapers to George Osborne's sugary budget

block-time published-time 10.34am GMT

IFS says UK faces 'genuinely big' cuts or tax rises if economy deteriorates again In his interviews this morning George Osborne played down the prospect of his having to impose further cuts, or increase taxes, in the future. (See 9.23am.) played down the prospect of his having to impose further cuts, or increase taxes, in the future. (See

But on the Today programme earlier Paul Johnson, the Institute for Fiscal Studies ’s director, said that Osborne only had a 50/50 chance of achieving his goal of getting the budget into surplus by the end of the decade and that, if the economy deteriorated again, “genuinely big” cuts or tax rises would be necessary. Johnsons said:

Within [Osborne’s] very tight rule he will probably get away with this this time round. But there’s only about a 50-50 shot that he’s going to get there.

If things change again, if the OBR downgrades its forecasts again, I don’t think he will be able to get away with anything like this. I think he will be forced to put some proper tax increases in or possibly find some yet further proper spending cuts.

I think this is going to be the last chance he gets to move things around like this without doing anything genuinely big to the public finances.

block-time published-time 10.18am GMT

Morgan publishes education white paper Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, has published the “Educational Excellence Everywhere” white paper. It contains plans to turn every school in England into an academy, but also to address under-performance in schools, particularly in the north.

Here is the 128-page white paper (pdf). And here is a written ministerial statement about it. (I haven’t seen a press notice yet.) In the statement Morgan says:

The excellence our reforms has unlocked in some parts of our schools system has not yet spread across the whole country. For example, 11 of the 16 English local authorities that have fewer than 60% of children attending good/outstanding schools, lower than national levels of GCSE attainment and where pupils make less than national levels of expected progress are in the North of England. Of the 173 failing secondary schools in the country, 130 are in the North and Midlands and 43 are in the South...

We believe that the fastest and most sustainable way for schools to improve is for government to trust this country’s most effective education leaders on the front line, holding them to account for unapologetically high standards for every child, but letting them determine how to reach them. This system will respond to performance, extending the reach of the most successful leaders and acting promptly by intervening where performance is not good enough. It will also ensure they have the necessary tools to seize the opportunities provided by greater autonomy.

This chart from the white paper helps to support Morgan’s claim that schools in the north are more likely to have problems. It shows the proportion of pupils in secondary schools with good or outstanding leadership

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and management in England. The yellow bits on the map are places where 100% of pupils are in schools with good leadership. The darker it gets, the worse the figures are.

Proportion of pupils in England in schools with good leadership Photograph: DfE Nicky Morgan, the education secretary Photograph: Ben Pruchnie/Getty Images block-time published-time 9.57am GMT

John McDonnell's morning interviews - Summary John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, has also been doing a round of interviews this morning. Here are the key points he's been making.

I've taken some of the quotes from the Press Association, from PoliticsHome and from the BBC's budget reaction blog. and from

* McDonnell said he was "really angry" about how unfair the budget was.

The budget was so unfair. What I was really angry about, and this came up last week, is that George Osborne has cut capital gains tax, and that actually is a cut in tax to the 5%, the wealthiest people in this country. And who has he taken the money from? People with disabilities, and I think that's unacceptable.

* He said 80% of the cuts were falling on women.

* He said Labour would probably support the plans for a lifetime ISA, but that the party wanted to study the detail.

We want to do anything that will encourage savings, but at the same time we have to recognise that the large number of people, almost 50%, actually have no savings whatsoever - young people in particular. There's issues about how that effects the pensions industry, so we'll look at the detail of that.

* He said he was worried about the impact the cut in business rates would have on council funding.

There's a worry now that government is cutting grant to local councils, withdrawing all grant eventually, forcing them to rely on local business rates, and if they're cutting business rates at the same time, that means that you're actually destabilising local government funding.

* He said Labour supported increasing the basic rate tax allowance.

* He refused to be drawn on how large state spending should be as a proportion of GDP. Asked about this, he replied:

We would develop the role of the state in which develops our economy efficiently and effectively. It will be on the basis of what works and we will develop our policies on the basis of consideration of what works.

My view is that we will develop this state on the basis of what we need. As soon as you have a figure like that, you set yourself up to either fail or fail the needs of the economy.

John McDonnell leaves New Broadcasting House after an interview this morning. Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA block-time published-time 9.23am GMT

George Osborne 's morning interviews - Summary Here are the main points from George Osborne 's morning interviews.

* Osborne said that Britain was on the verge of getting agreement from Brussels to allow it to abolish the so-called "tampon tax" - 5% VAT on tampons. (See 8.40am.)

* He refused to rule out further cuts. Asked if further cuts might be necessary on the Today programme, he replied:

I've never shied away from saying that if the country can't afford something, we've got to take action. And we've got to cut our cloth accordingly.

But he also played down the prospect of cuts, or tax rises, being necessary. In an interview with BBC Breakfast he said his current plans should deliver a budget surplus.

We have got to hold to the course that we have set out.

I have set out the plans in the budget and then a completely independent body which everybody respects - the Office for Budget Responsibility - has looked at those plans and it says, 'If you hold to the course, you deliver those plans. If the economy grows as expected, then we will have a surplus towards the end of the parliament'. We wouldn't need anything extra like more spending cuts or more tax increases.

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* He defended his decision to cut the Personal Independent Payment (PIP), a disability payment. The government was responding to an independent report which recommended changes to ensure that the benefit was focused on those who needed most help, he said. And he said that overall the money going to disabled people was going up.

* He played down the controversy about Daily Mail coverage of the budget focusing on Theresa May 's cleavage. An article for Mail Online yesterday carried the headline "Boom and Bust" alongside a pictures of the home secretary watching the budget speech in a low-cut top. Everyday Sexism criticised the report, although the Mail does not seem bothered; today's paper carries four separate pictures of May in her top on page three. Asked by LBC if he had provided the "boom" while May provided the "bust", Osborne replied:

I did see those photos. All I can say is I think it is something to do with the camera lens and the angle.

George Osborne (2nd left) leaving 11 Downing Street yesterday with his Treasury team: (L-R) Commercial Secretary to the Treasury Lord O'Neill of Gatley, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury Damien Hinds, Financial Secretary to the Treasury David Gauke, Parliamentary Private Secretary to George Osborne , Chris Skidmore, City Minister Harriett Baldwin and Chief Secretary to the Secretary, Greg Hands Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/AFP/Getty Images George Osborne defends his budget surplus rule block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.07pm GMT

block-time published-time 9.04am GMT

Here is some Twitter comment on George Osborne 's Today interview.

From the Gaurdian's Nicholas Watt

enltrOne of less certain post budget performances @BBCr4today . Wondering if @George_Osborne thinks initial instinct right: shd have taken for sec

— Nicholas Watt (@nicholaswatt) March 17, 2016 By "for sec", he means the foreign secretary post.

From the Sun 's Tom Newton Dunn

enltrJohn Humphrys not really laying a finger on George Osborne yet. Needs to get on to sugar tax and his dead cat on table motive #BBCR4today yet. Needs to get on to sugar tax and his dead cat on table motive

— Tom Newton Dunn (@tnewtondunn) March 17, 2016 block-time published-time 8.47am GMT

While we're on the subject of the tampon tax, it is worth recalling, for anyone who has not heard it before, the story about how Gordon Brown cut VAT on tampons from 17.5% to 5% in 2000 - but did not mention it in his budget speech because he found the prospect of talking about sanitary products in the Commons too embarrasing.

Damian McBride, his former spin doctor, thinks it is the only example of a chancellor implementing a budget tax cut but not announcing it in his speech to MPs. Instead it was announced in the documents published by the Treasury on budget day.

block-time published-time 8.40am GMT

What Osborne said about the tampon tax This is what George Osborne said about Britain being on the verge of getting Brussels agreement to scrap the tampon tax.

I said we would get agreement that we could reduce this rate to zero. And I think we are on the verge of getting that international agreement... I think we are going to get that agreement in the next few days, we hope. And people will see two crucial things about this government. First of all, we are a strong voice in the world and we get what we ask for because we are at the top table. And, second, we do the right thing by our country.

The question came up because a Labour MP, Paula Sherriff, has tabled an amendment to the finance bill to abolish the 5% VAT raised on women's sanitary products. At the moment the government cannot reduce it to zero because of the EU 's rules about VAT, and the government faces defeat because this is an issue where Labour MPs will unite with Tory backbenchers (some of whom may not feel strongly about tampons, but certainly do feel very strongly about the EU .)

block-time published-time 8.28am GMT

Osborne says Britain on verge of getting Brussels agreement to scrap tampon tax Q: A Labour MP has tabled an amendment to the finance bill to cut the tampon tax to zero. If that goes through, will you remove the tampon tax?

Osborne says he understands people's anger about this.

He says he has ensured all the money from VAT on tampons goes to women's charities.

He says the government is committed to getting an agreement in Brussels that will allow us to reduce the tampon tax to zero. He says Britain is "on the verge" of getting that agreement. He says he expects an announcement "within the next few days".

* Osborne says Britain on verge of getting Brussels agreement to scrap tampon tax.

And that's it. The interview is over.

I will post a summary soon.

block-time published-time 8.25am GMT

Osborne says the government needs to do more to tackle productivity.

Productivity is an economist's term for what is achieved by the talents and efforts of the British people.

He says today's education white paper will help.

All Western countries face the same challenge, he says.

Q: A boss on this programme yesterday said our biggest export to the rest of the world was fresh air (because of the trade deficit, and containers leaving the UK empty).

Osborne says the car industry has been a major success story.

Q: We think the French are idle. But they are more productive. They achieve more by Thursday than we do by the end of the week.

Osborne says he accepts productivity is a challenge.

He says he is talking from the Pennines, where he is visiting a school.

block-time published-time 8.22am GMT

Osborne refuses to rule out further cuts Q: But we could be facing greater cuts?

Osborne says he has never shied away from saying if the country can't afford something, it has to cut its cloth accordingly.

Q: So the answer is yes.

Osborne says under Labour the government was not prepared for the recession.

* Osborne refuses to rule out further cuts.

block-time published-time 8.20am GMT

Q: Most people think you will need a miracle to get the budget into surplus.

Not quite, says Osborne.

Q: Okay, but the OBR says the chance is 50/50.

Osborne says that is what the OBR has always said.

The budget surplus is necessary so as a country we are living within our means.

Q: So is that an absolute commitment?

Osborne says the commitment applies "in normal times".

Q: So it's not a firm commitment. You have not quite fiddled but adjusted the figures. Is there a commitment to reach a surplus.

Osborne says there is a commitment "in normal times".

Q: So no is the answer.

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Osborne says obviously in a recession you have to alter your plans. That is a sensible, flexible, common sense approach.

block-time published-time 8.17am GMT

Q: You made three commitments to the nation. You have failed to achieve two of them, and it looks as if you will fail on the third. What do you have to do to get the sack?

Osborne says the people can chuck out a government if they don't like it.

People know there are problems around the world. They want to know how the government will respond.

He is not pretending he has abolished boom and bust.

Q: But you haven't?

Osborne says he has cut spending. People complain about this on the Today programme every day.

Borrowing has gone down, he says

Q: But you are not meeting your target of getting debt down as a proportion of GDP.

Osborne says he said that in the budget. Economic conditions have deteriorated in recent months. That is why he adjusted his plans.

These sound like abstract rules.

But this is really about economic security, he says.

block-time published-time 8.14am GMT

George Osborne 's Today interview George Osborne is on Today. John Humphrys is interviewing him.

Osborne says he has achieved a lot of what he set out to achieve.

Q: But you set yourself three targets, and you have failed to meet two of them.

Osborne says he set out his targets. They are in a charter. He is trying to repair the public finances.

Q: You said you were going to do these things. And you have failed to achieve two out of three.

Osborne says he subjected himself to independent scrutiny. No chancellor has done this before.

When he became chancellor, the government was borrowing £1 for every £4 it spent. Now it is £1 for every £14.

He says he does not hide from setting out the challenges the country faces.

block-time published-time 8.08am GMT

The day after the budget is normally the day when the toughest scrutiny takes place, and George Osborne is doing a round of interviews. He is about to appear on the Today programme and I will be covering that in detail, before picking up on what he has said in all the other ones.

Later we've got the much-anticipated Institute for Fiscal Studies briefing on the budget.

Here's the Guardian 's overnight budget splash.

Related: George Osborne's budget 2016 giveaways 'mask £56bn black hole'

Here is the agenda for the day.

8.10am: George Osborne 's Today interview.

Around 11.30am: MPs resume debate on the budget.

1pm: The Institute for Fiscal Studies holds its post-budget briefing.

2pm: Nicky Morgan, the education secretary, gives a speech on the education white paper.

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I will mostly be focusing on budget matters today but I will also be covering the breaking political news as it happens, as well as bringing you the best reaction, comment and analysis from the web. I will post a summary at lunchtime and another in the afternoon.

If you want to follow me or contact me on Twitter , I'm on @AndrewSparrow. , I'm on

I try to monitor the comments BTL but normally I find it impossible to read them all. If you have a direct question, do include "Andrew" in it somewhere and I'm more likely to find it. I do try to answer direct questions, although sometimes I miss them or don't have time. Alternatively you could post a question to me on Twitter .

If you think there are any voices that I'm leaving out, particularly political figures or organisations giving alternative views of the stories I'm covering, do please flag them up below the line (include "Andrew" in the post). I can't promise to include everything, but I do try to be open to as wide a range of perspectives as possible.

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News
'Tampon tax' to be scrapped after new deal with EU

By Charlie Cooper WHITEHALL CORRESPONDENT
195 words
18 March 2016
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IIND
1ST
4,5
English
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News | VAT

The "tampon tax" is to be scrapped in Britain after European Union leaders agreed to allow member states to remove VAT on sanitary products. George Osborne indicated in the autumn that he wanted to scrap the 5 per cent VAT rate charged on tampons and other such goods but was prevented by EU tax law.

However, with Eurosceptic Tories threatening to join forces with Labour to embarrass the Government over the issue, David Cameron swiftly won a deal at an EU summit in Brussels last night. The 28 EU leaders agreed to welcome "the intention of the [European] Commission to include proposals for increased flexibility for member states with respect to reduced rates of VAT, which will provide the option to member states of VAT zero-rating sanitary products".

The Chancellor said that the Government had "heard people's anger over paying the tampon tax loud and clear".

"We said we'd fight for agreement to reduce the VAT rate to zero and tonight all European leaders have welcomed our plan to do just that," Mr Osborne said.

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News
Cameron 'win' over EU lev y mocked

CRAIG WOODHOUSE
163 words
18 March 2016
The Sun
THESUN
2; National
8
English
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TAMPON TAXDAVID Cameron and George Osborne were ridiculed last night after claiming to have won a key EU victory over the "tampon tax".

Both were jubilant after European leaders agreed to give nations "increased flexibility" to end the hated five per cent VAT on sanitary products.

Mr Osborne claimed: "It just shows how Britain can make a case for a reform ... as a powerful, confident voice inside a reformed EU."

But seasoned Brussels watchers scorned the claim, saying the powers could still be blocked.

Others said the PM had only made a fuss because he faces a Commons rebellion on the issue.

Eurosceptic Tory Andrew Percy tweeted: "For years we've tried to scrap tampon tax. Referendum coming, need good news story, they offer it up!" MPs will back an amendment to next week's Finance Bill opposing the tampon tax and a diktat forcing us to hike VAT on home insulation.

Document THESUN0020160318ec3i000f0

The Daily Telegraph

News
PM claims win in 'tampon tax' row

Ben Riley-Smith
547 words
18 March 2016
The Daily Telegraph
DT
1; National
6,7
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The Daily Telegraph © 2016. Telegraph Media Group Ltd.

Eurosceptic Tories say Brussels deal is not enough to quell rebellion

DAVID CAMERON claimed to have scrapped the socalled "tampon tax" last night after securing a deal with EU leaders, but was left still facing a rebellion from Eurosceptic Tory MPs.

The Prime Minister revealed that all 28 EU leaders had welcomed the "intention" of Brussels to remove the 5 per cent VAT currently levied on all sanitary products, which has provoked growing anger on his back benches.

However Conservative MPs backing Brexit said the deal could still be vetoed in the European Parliament and stuck by plans to back a Labour amendment ending the tax.

The rebel Conservative MPs also vowed to join their Labour opponents to defeat the Government over taxes on solar panels.

Tory Eurosceptics have made it abundantly clear that they are ready to take the fight to ministers over a string of frustrations ahead of the EU referendum.

The 5 per cent VAT on sanitary products demanded by the EU has particularly infuriated Tories.

They will back the Labour amendment on Tuesday.

A second rebellion is brewing on the same day after HMRC indicated it would push ahead with a massive increase in VAT on solar panels and insulation because of EU law.

It is understood the Tory rebels are setting up a whipping operation over their opposition to the tampon tax and are even co-ordinating with Jeremy Corbyn's office.

The Chancellor attempted to head off frustration by saying the tax could scrapped within "days".

However, Mr Cameron's announcement was dismissed by Eurosceptics as proving the "absurdity" of Britain's position because the Prime Minister had to get approval from Brussels for a change that would have been agreed by Parliament.

They also warned that any solution that emerges would only be a proposal and could ultimately be vetoed by any of the 28 states. The Budget had been designed to minimise party tensions ahead of the EU referendum.

On Wednesday, Mr Osborne said that he would be giving the £12 million raised by the tampon tax to women's charities.

However, Tories are demanding he go a step further by getting rid of the tax all together and are ready to vote for a Labour amendment proposing as much. Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Tory MP for Berwick upon Tweed, who backs Brexit, said: "The people we elect should be responsible for setting the taxes in this country - not unelected EU judges and bureaucrats."

"It is a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation, which is what we now have."

John Redwood, the Eurosceptic former Welsh secretary, said changes to the rate of tax on insulation and other energy-saving products was "the VAT rise in the budget that did not get a mention".

It is due to rise from 5 per cent to 20 per cent due to a ruling by the European Court of Justice.

He said: "I for one will be opposing this measure, as I do not wish to see energy conservation taxed in this way and object strongly to the erosion of our taxation powers by the European Court."

'The people we elect should be responsible for setting taxes'

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theguardian

Money
Tampon tax to be scrapped, announces Osborne

Heather Stewart
300 words
18 March 2016
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The Guardian
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Government says it has won EU backing for change in rules which imposed 5% VAT on women's sanitary products

George Osborne has announced that he will abolish the tampon tax – the 5% VAT charged on women's sanitary products – after the prime minister raised the issue with his European partners at a summit in Brussels.

The chancellor had faced a potential rebellion over the issue, after an amendment tabled by the Labour MP for Dewsbury and Mirfield, Paula Sherriff, won the backing of Eurosceptics keen to assert Britain's power to set its own tax rates.

EU rules determine the scope of VAT, and before he could reduce the rate to zero, Osborne had to persuade his colleagues across the EU. A review of the issue was due to be published next week but on Friday night the government announced that it had already won EU backing for a change in the rules.

The chancellor said: "We've used our seat at the top table in Europe to secure what the British public has demanded – common sense on VAT and an end to the tampon tax."

The Treasury said it would include provisions in next week's finance bill, which implements the tax and spending decisions announced in Wednesday's budget, to make the change, after securing EU agreement that national parliaments should have more control over VAT.

"I said last year we were committed to getting the EU rules changed, and until that happened we would use the money raised to fund women's health and support charities," said Osborne.

Restive Eurosceptic backbenchers, who had backed the tampon tax amendment partly to make a political point, are also threatening to rebel over VAT levelled on energy-saving products.

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Mail Online

News

European leaders agree to relax VAT rules to let Britain scrap the tampon tax

JASON GROVES, DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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* EU leaders have agreed to relax VAT rules to let Britain scrap 'tampon tax'

* As it stands a 5 per cent VAT levy is charged on female sanitary products

* But UK Chancellor is powerless to scrap or even change it because it is administered by EU officials in Brussels

* Eurosceptic Tories and Labour table amendment to scrap 'tampon tax'

* It may deliver an embarrassing defeat for Osborne on his Budget measures

David Cameron begged EU chief Jean-Claude Juncker for permission to reduce the VAT on tampons yesterday as he tried to head off a major Commons rebellion.

In a humiliating encounter, the Prime Minister was forced to use a Brussels summit on the migrant crisis to plead for help on reducing British tax rates on female sanitary products.

Last night it appeared that Brussels was preparing to offer an olive branch on the issue next week by allowing Britain to scrap the 5 per cent VAT rate on tampons.

EU leaders signalled they would come to Mr Cameron’s aid on the issue, which has proved embarrassing for the Prime Minister and Chancellor as they try to convince voters to stay in the EU.

In a joint statement, they said they welcomed the intention of the European Commission to come forward with proposals that would ‘provide the option to member states of VAT zero rating for sanitary products’.

Mr Osborne said the deal showed the value of being a ‘powerful, confident voice’ in the EU. He added: ‘We said we’d fight for agreement, and tonight all European leaders have welcomed our plan to do just that. We’ve achieved what no British government has even tried to achieve.’

But Matthew Elliott, of the Vote Leave campaign, said: ‘Even if the PM does win support for these proposals, they will take a long time to come into force, possibly years.’

Rebel MPs indicated that they would press ahead with a vote on the issue in the Commons, which could produce a rare Budget defeat for the Government.

They said the row highlighted the extent to which Brussels can overrule British sovereignty. Campaigners have fought for years to have the so-called tampon tax removed, arguing that sanitary products are a necessity, not a luxury, and should therefore not attract VAT.

But under EU rules, the Government has been unable to scrap the tax. Last year, George Osborne courted controversy by announcing that the £12million a year raised from the tax would be given to women’s charities.

But campaigners say the tax should be scrapped altogether rather than forcing women to fund charitable projects that should be paid for out of general taxation.

INHERITANCE TAX UPSURGE

The Treasury is on track to pocket millions extra from inheritance tax receipts after a spike in winter deaths.

The flu virus struck particularly hard last year because the vaccine was less effective than previous versions.

That led to the highest number of winter deaths since 1999, according to the Office for National Statistics. Most of those affected were over 75.

In a report, the Office for Budget Responsibility said more estates had been dragged into the inheritance tax net by soaring house prices. It now expects families to hand over £200million more to the Exchequer than the watchdog had originally forecast.

This will help the Government rake in a huge £4.6billion in death taxes this year – a fifth more than it collected in 2014-2015.

The tax was originally meant to be paid only by the wealthiest families. But runaway property prices have ensured that millions of middle class homeowners now face the levy.

Currently, the tax is charged at 40 per cent on assets above £325,000 for a single person or £650,000 for a married couple. From 2017, this will rise to £500,000 for individuals and £1million for couples with a family home.

2 MILLION PUNISHED BY 40P RATE

Nearly 2million workers have lost out because George Osborne has not raised the 40p income tax threshold in line with inflation, experts said yesterday.

The Chancellor used the Budget to raise the point at which the higher rate kicks in from £42,385 to £45,000 in April 2017.

The measure will hand an average £400 tax cut to hundreds of thousands of middle class families.

But the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank said the 40p threshold would have been £54,405 in 2017-18 if it had gone up with inflation since Mr Osborne became Chancellor in 2010.

Freezes or reductions of the threshold since 2010 have acted like a stealth tax.

Righer rate income tax payers, of whom there were 1.7million in the 1990s and 3million in 2010, now number 5million.

The IFS claims it would have hit 5.4million if the Chancellor had not taken action in the Budget this week, meaning 400,000 people have been saved from the higher rate.

It said that a rise in line with inflation would have seen just 3.2million paying the 40p rate or 45p additional rate in 2017-18.

More than 300,000 people have signed a petition calling on the Government to act. Last night, sources at the European Commission indicated that a long-running review of VAT rules in the EU would grant the UK permission to apply a zero rate of VAT to sanitary products.

MPs have tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill that would compel the government to unilaterally scrap the tax in defiance of EU law.

Labour MP Paula Sherriff urged the Chancellor to accept her cross-party amendment, adding: ‘If he is really on the verge of an agreement, that should be reflected in this year’s Finance Bill with a clear timetable for abolition of the tax.

‘My amendment would allow that, so I invite the Chancellor to announce now that he will accept the amendment next week.

‘If he refuses to act, I will seek to put it to a vote and I believe I will get strong support from across the House.’ Tory MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan said the row highlighted the extent to which Brussels can overrule British sovereignty.

She added: ‘One of the key reasons that I am voting to leave is because we are losing more and more control to the EU.

‘The people we elect should be responsible for setting the taxes in this country – not unelected EU judges and bureaucrats. It is a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation, which is what we now have.’

Ukip leader Nigel Farage said it was humiliating to see British leaders ‘on their knees’ in Brussels pleading for permission to set tax rates in the UK. He added: ‘It is pathetic for our country.’

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The EU jealously guards rules on the application of VAT, partly because it gets some of its revenue from the tax. About 0.3 per cent of VAT revenues across Europe are sent to Brussels to fund the European Commission.

Member states are barred from cutting VAT below 5 per cent on products on which it is levied.

When the UK joined the EU in 1973, VAT on tampons was levied at the full rate of 17.5 per cent, because Parliament had classed them as a ‘non-essential luxury’ item.

Former Labour Treasury minister Dawn Primarolo cut it to 5 per cent in 2000, saying it was ‘about doing what we can to lower the cost of a necessity’. But successive governments have been unable to go further and scrap the tax altogether.

The European Commission last night said it was working on two options that would allow member states more flexibility over the setting of VAT rates.

A Commission spokeswoman said that under current rules, member states were not allowed to apply a zero VAT rate to a product unless all other member states agree.

‘Most Member States tax sanitary products like tampons at around 20 per cent or more,’ she added.

REAL LUXURIES EXEMPT FROM TAX

Luxury items ranging from ostrich meat and alcoholic jellies to boats and even helicopters are exempt from VAT.

But sanitary products qualify for the tax because they are said to be ‘non-essential, luxury’ goods.

There are three VAT rates in the UK: the 20 per cent standard rate, which applies to most goods and services; a reduced rate of 5 per cent; and zero-rated, which includes food and drink.

In 2000 the rate on sanitary items was dropped from the old top level of 17.5 per cent to 5 per cent following a campaign by Labour MP Dawn Primarolo.

But the Government has said it cannot go any lower because of EU rules which forbid scrapping VAT once it has been imposed or introducing new zero-rated items.

Five per cent is the lowest rate allowed under Britain’s agreements with European partners.

A wealth of luxury groceries fall among zero-rated items because all food and drink is exempt.

They include candied peel, herbal tea, exotic meat such as horse, ostrich, crocodile and kangaroo, and ready meals.

Also on the zero VAT list are slimming meal replacement products, savoury snacks and alcoholic dessert jellies.

Helicopters and aircraft used for passenger and freight transport – but not private use – and boats also qualify, although vessels used for recreation or pleasure do not.

Other 5 per cent items include products to help people stop smoking.

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Mail Online

News

The sugar tax backlash: Osborne's new levy could force up price of diet drinks and even bottles of water, say critics

MATT DATHAN, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR MAILONLINE, TIM SCULTHORPE, DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR FOR MAILONLINE, DANIEL MARTIN and TAMARA COHEN FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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* Institute for Fiscal Studies says the sugar tax 'leaves a lot to be desired'

* Economic experts predict consumers will switch to other high sugar drinks

* The sweetest drinks will attract less tax per gram, IFS economists warn

* Design of tax means consumers could pay less tax and drink more sugar

* Tax could add up to 24p on a litre of fizzy drinks - equivalent to 8p for a can

* The effects of the tax are 'incredibly uncertain', economists at IFS say

* A poll finds that four out of five Tory MPs oppose the sugar tax

* For more of the latest on the 2016 Budget visit www.dailymail.co.uk/budget

George Osborne's sugar tax could push up the price of diet drinks and encourage us to eat more chocolate, experts said yesterday.

The Chancellor shocked MPs by announcing the levy in Wednesday's Budget. It will add up to 24p to the price of a litre of fizzy drinks, if the full cost is passed on to the consumer.

But last night the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), a free market think-tank, warned that global drinks giants could simply absorb the costs by putting up the cost of other products – including bottled water and low-sugar drinks.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) also said that manufacturers may raise prices for all drinks, without a disproportionate hike on high-sugar ones.

Scroll down for video

A poll out today also found that Mr Osborne faces firm opposition to the measure from within his own party with four out of five Tory MPs against it.

And economists at the IFS said today that the effects of the tax are 'incredibly uncertain' as it is unknown how consumers and the drinks industry will respond to news of the levy.

They warned that the impact of tax could be offset if people switch to fruit juices or milkshakes, which will be exempt from the new sugar tax.

Economists also said the way the tax is planned will be so complicated that the most sugary drinks might not attract any tax at all.

* The independent Office for Budget Responsibility only rates Mr Osborne's chances of hitting his deficit targets at 55 per cent - but the watchdog's chief said the Chancellor was just about on track.

* Labour claimed Mr Osborne had left a £560million blackhole in the schools budget. The Opposition said converting 15,000 schools would cost more than £700million based on the average conversion cost of £44,837. Mr Osborne announced a £140million plan for the policy.

* Shadow chancellor John McDonnell said he was concerned about the 'fairness' of Mr Osborne's plans and blasted the 'political choices' in the Budget.

* Mr Osborne claimed Britain was 'on the verge' of securing a deal with the EU to end the so-called 'tampon tax' which demands female sanitary products be charged VAT.

* The Chancellor insisted the Budget for helping disabled people was going up overall amid a row over £1.2billion in cuts to disability benefits.

Drinks companies reacted angrily to news of the sugar tax, with Coca Cola saying the levy will not change habits and claiming it is not the right way to tackle childhood obesity.

IFS director Paul Johnson said that while there was a 'sound' case for the sugar levy, in economic terms it was 'very partial'.

THE MOST SUGARY SOFT DRINKS TO BE HIT BY OSBORNE'S SUGAR TAX

Drinks with more than 5g of sugar per 100ml will be taxed at a lower rate of 6p per drink. These include:

Schweppes Indian Tonic Water: 5.1g

Sprite: 6.6g

Fanta: 6.9g

Dr Pepper: 7.2g

Um Bongo: 7.5g

Drinks with more than 8g of sugar per 100ml will be taxed at a higher rate of 8p per drink. These include:

Lucozade original: 8.7g

Ribena: 9.9g

Dr Pepper: 10.3g

Irn Bru: 10.3g

Pepsi: 10.6g

Coca-Cola: 10.6g

7 Up: 10.6g

Red Bull: 11g

Rockstar energy drink: 12.7g

Old Jamaican ginger beer: 15.2g

Assessing the plans this afternoon, he said: 'Only around 17 per cent of added sugar consumed comes from soft drinks - though the proportion in households with children is a little higher,' he said.

'Obviously the soft drinks tax won't have any impact on the other 80-plus percent of sugar consumption - indeed it might increase it as people move away from soft drinks to other sugary products.'

Kate Smith, a senior research economist at the IFS, warned: 'The effects of this tax are incredibly uncertain and will depend crucially on how people respond to their tax - both on the consumer and on the food industry side.

'Indeed the effect of the tax on people's sugar consumption might be offset if people switch to fruit juices or other high sugary products.

'And finally, the design of the tax proposed yesterday leaves a lot to be desired. Levying the tax per litre means that sugary drinks will attract a lower tax per gram of sugar and really a much more sensible schedule would have been to have a constant or an increasing tax per gram of sugar.'

Ms Smith also warned that introducing the sugar tax could lead to 'cross-border shopping and illicit trade'.

The design of the tax means consumers could pay less tax but consume more sugar.

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Coca Cola contains 10.6 grams of sugar per 100ml. Three litres of the drink would total 318 grams of sugar and attract 72p of tax.

But drinking just two litres of Sainsbury's Orange Energy Drink would total the same amount of sugar but attract just 48p of tax.

A survey of MPs found 83 per cent of Conservative MPs opposed to the tax, with just 6 per cent in favour.

Overall MPs are evenly split, according to the poll by Dods, with a survey of 96 MPs finding that 41 supported a sugar tax, 41 opposed it and 14 undecided.

Reacting to the sugar tax today, Coca-Cola's UK boss Leendert den Hollander said: 'We don't believe the sugar tax is the right thing to be done. We are not debating the issue, we are debating the solution. The facts don't suggest that a sugar tax works to change behaviour.

'We know this is one of the mechanics and solutions that people think will help deal with the issue of obesity, at least from a government perspective but there is no evidence to suggest that this will reduce obesity.'

Seconds after today's Commons announcement shares in the soft drinks industry were sent plummeting.

Prices in Britvic, which makes Tango, Coca-Cola's British arm, and Irn-Bru maker A.G. Barr fell by up to 27p per share.

TORY EUROSCEPTICS THREATEN BUDGET REBELLION OVER THE 'TAMPON TAX'

The so-called 'tampon tax' emerged at the centre of a fresh Tory row over Europe today as scores of Conservative MPs threatened to impose embarrassing amendments to George Osborne's Budget.

A 5 per cent VAT levy is charged on female sanitary products and is administered by officials in Brussels.

It means the UK Chancellor cannot decide to scrap the £12million tax raised from the tax and cannot even change the rate at which it is charged.

Eurosceptic Tory MPs are joining with Labour MPs, who have tabled an amendment to the Commons vote on the measures set out in yesterday's Budget.

If successful, the amendment would mean the 5 per cent sanitary product tax could be struck off the Budget resolutions - but that would break EU rules.

It would give Brexit campaigners a powerful example of how the UK is constrained by the EU and left powerless to change even the smallest changes to VAT.

However Mr Osborne said this morning that Britain was on the verge of a deal with Brussels which would allow it to scrap the 'tampon tax', although opposition from the French may scupper the plans.

In yesterday's Budget he admitted he could not scrap the 'tampon tax' but pledged to allocate all the £12million revenue from the levy to women's charities such as Breast Cancer Care and the White Ribbon Campaign, which helps victims of domestic violence.

Labour MP Paula Sherriff, who tabled the amendment, said the levy on female sanitary tax was a 'tax on women'.

Even shares in Tate and Lyle tumbled, despite having sold their sugar business in 2009. Its share price shot back up again as traders appeared to realise their mistake.

Economists and leading think tanks were scathing of the measure, saying he will be 'picking the pockets of the poor for no benefit' and warned that it was the first step on the way to a 'fat tax'.

The levy could add 8p to the price of cans of fizzy drinks like Coca Cola, 7Up and Irn Bru, energy drinks like Red Bull and carton juice drinks like Ribena from 2018.

Campaigners including Jamie Oliver and the NHS are celebrating the Budget decision, which will raise an estimated £520million a year for the Treasury.

But there was fury when it emerged sweet high street coffees, teas, and milkshakes, which can contain up to 25 teaspoons of sugar, will be exempt because they contain milk. Pure fruit juices will also not be taxed.

Mark Littlewood, Director General of the Institute of Economic Affairs, said: 'It is astonishing that the Chancellor has announced a tax on sugary drinks when there is no evidence from anywhere in the world that such taxes have the slightest effect on obesity.

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'Whether dressed up as a direct tax or a levy on industry, the effect will be that the government will be picking the pockets of the poor for no benefit.'

Another think thank, the Adam Smith Institute, said the sugar tax in Britain made 'little sense'.

Executive director Sam Bowman said: 'A tax on sugary soft drinks is the first step on the road to fat taxes and sugar taxes more generally.

'It makes little sense to tax sugary drinks on their own, rather than sugar more generally – a couple of Mars bars are just as bad as a bottle of Coke – but the Chancellor probably reckons that the public won't care if he only targets soft drinks.'

The British drinks industry was furious today - and may have been unaware the announcement was coming.

Some also argued that the decision could cost jobs.

British Soft Drinks Association director general Gavin Partington said: 'We are extremely disappointed by the Government's decision to hit the only category in the food and drink sector which has consistently reduced sugar intake in recent years - down 13.6 per cent since 2012.

'We are the only category with an ambitious plan for the years ahead - in 2015 we agreed a calorie reduction goal of 20% by 2020. By contrast, sugar and calorie intake from all other major take home food categories is increasing - which makes the targeting of soft drinks simply absurd.'

Meanwhile Jonathan Isaby, chief executive of the TaxPayers' Alliance, said: 'It is ludicrous that the Chancellor decided to cave in to the demands of the High Priest of the Nanny State in the public health lobby and introduce a hugely regressive and entirely ineffective sugar tax.

'This will hit the poorest families hardest and all the evidence shows it simply won't work.'

FOUR IN FIVE TORY MPS OPPOSE GEORGE OSBORNE'S SUGAR TAX

Tories overwhelmingly oppose George Osborne's sugar tax, a poll found today.

Four out of five Conservative MPs are against the levy, which could add up to 24p to a litre of fizzy drinks, meaning a can of Coke would rise by 8p.

Overall MPs are split on the sugar tax, with a survey of 96 MPs finding 41 in favour, 41 against and 14 undecided.

The poll, conducted last week by Dods, found that 83 per cent of Conservative MPs who responded to the survey were opposed to a sugar tax, with just 6 per cent in favour.

Three in four Labour MPs support the measure - including leader Jeremy Corbyn - with 12 per cent against.

Six of the eight Lib Dem MPs support the sugar tax with the other two opposed.

But Jeremy Hunt, the Health Secretary who will set out the Government's overall strategy on childhood obesity in the summer, welcomed the news of a sugar levy.

Writing on Twitter, he said: 'Parents over Britain will welcome sugary drinks levy to fund doubling of school sport budget. More 2 do on childhood obesity but great start.'

David Cameron's official spokeswoman said: 'Our message to industry is clear. Let's work together on this, let's make sure we are bringing down the amount of sugar in the products our children consume because that's in all our interests.'

She added: 'We set out yesterday a levy we are specifically introducing on the soft drinks industry to try and incentivise and change behaviours.

'This will be part of a comprehensive strategy – I'm not going to start speculating on that now. That does not mean I am ruling things in.'

Q&A: HOW SUGAR TAX WILL WORK AND WHAT WILL BE MORE EXPENSIVE

When will it come into force?

From April 2018 soft drinks companies will pay a levy on drinks with added sugar.

Why are the Government introducing this tax?

The move aims to help tackle childhood obesity. Sugar-sweetened soft drinks are now the single biggest source of dietary sugar for children and teenagers. Ministers hope the move will mean that drinks companies cut down on the amount of sugar in drinks. The measure could also move consumers towards lower sugar alternatives and reduce portion sizes, they said.

How will it work and who will pay?

The new levy will apply to drinks with total sugar content above 5 grams per 100 millilitres, with a higher rate for more than 8 grams per 100 millilitres.

What sort of drinks will be affected?

Examples of drinks which would currently fall under the higher rate of the charge include full-strength Coca-Cola and Pepsi, Old Jamaica Ginger Beer, Capri Sun blackcurrant, Red Bull, Strawberry Ribena, Lucozade Energy, Irn-Bru and Fever-Tree tonic water, said the Treasury.

The lower rate would catch drinks like Dr Pepper, Fanta, Sprite, Schweppes Indian Tonic Water and alcohol-free shandies. Escaping the tax altogether would be drinks like Volvic Touch of Fruit, Vimto, Powerade and Tropicana Smooth Orange.

Will it apply to all drinks?

The new levy will not be paid on milk-based drinks and fruit juices.

Does this mean that sugary drinks will be more expensive?

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has estimated it could add 18-24p to the price of a litre of fizzy drink if the full cost is passed on to the consumer. But a Treasury spokesman said: 'We are hoping that producers do not pass on to consumers the costs. They can obviously reformulate their products, which many of them have done, and Robinson's for example has removed added sugar from most of its drinks and Tesco has pledged a 5% reduction in sugar in its ranges.

'So they can reformulate, they can reduce portion sizes and they can promote diet products.'

How much money will this new tax raise?

Ministers hope the measure will raise £520 million in the first year. But the OBR estimates that this figure will drop as drinks companies reduce the sugar in their products and people make healthier choices.

What will happen to the money raised?

In England the money will be reinvested for sports in schools.

Is the Government the first in the world to introduce such a tax?

No - other countries have experimented with sugar taxes. Scandinavian countries have imposed similar taxes as have France and Hungary. In 2014 Mexico also introduced a sugar tax levy on soft drinks. South Africa plans to introduce a similar measure in 2017.

Has the Government looked at how these levies have worked elsewhere?

The Treasury said it has looked at the way sugar taxes have been used around the world and opted for a model similar to Hungary, where the introduction of a tax on companies has led to a 40% reduction in levels of sugar in products.

Britain faces ANOTHER year of austerity just so George Osborne can juggle the numbers and clear the deficit before the next election spending watchdog warns

George Osborne is planning an extra year of austerity that will push cuts into the next decade to help him clear the deficit as planned, the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned today.

Paul Johnson, the think tank's director, said the forecasts unveiled by the Chancellor in the Budget suggested spending would fall by £10billion in 2020/21.

And he slammed Mr Osborne for 'shuffling' money between tax years in an effort to meet his 'economically irrelevant' goal of a £10billion surplus before the next election.

At a bombshell briefing the day after Mr Osborne's eighth Budget repeated his claim that even if Mr Osborne is not blown off course yet again he still only has a 50/50 chance of hitting his target.

IT'S NOT BEEN A SWEET SUCCESS ABROAD

Attempts to introduce a sugar tax in other countries have had limited success.

In 2013, Denmark said it was abolishing its sugar tax, which was introduced in the 1930s, to boost its economy and create jobs. The sugar tax and equally disliked fat tax had been notably unsuccessful, with Danes simply going to Sweden and Germany to buy soft drinks, ice cream and butter.

Former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg's attempts to ban large fizzy drinks in his city were thrown out the day before they were due to come into effect in 2013.

The Coca-Cola Company said the 'people of New York City are much smarter than the New York City Health Department believes', and the New York Court of Appeals ruled that Mr Bloomberg did not have the authority to act unilaterally, without the approval of councillors. Ruling that the proposed law would be 'arbitrary and capricious', they threw it out.

Mexico, which has the world's highest obesity rate, introduced a 10 per cent tax per litre on soft drinks, especially fizzy drinks, in 2013.

Health experts applauded Mexico's efforts, but the British food and drinks industry said there was no evidence that the sugar tax had reduced levels of obesity.

In 2012, France brought in a targeted duty on sugary drinks, which are now estimated to be up to 3.5 per cent more expensive than they were before.

Norway also has a sugar tax on refined sugar products, including soft drinks, while the South African government proposed a sugar-sweetened beverages tax in this year's Budget.

Mr Johnson said: "If the OBR is right about that we should all be worried.

'This will lead to lower wages and living standards, not just lower tax revenues for the Treasury.'

He added: 'In the longer term the public finances are kept on track only by adding yet another year of planned austerity on the spending side.

'Spending in 2020-/21 will be £10bn less than planned.'

Mr Johnson admitted the elimination of the deficit would represent a 'huge turnaround over the decade' in the state of the public finances.

Mr Osborne has been vigorously defending his Budget plans today, insisting hitting his deficit targets would not mean tax hikes or more spending cuts.

But his efforts were not helped when he was caught on camera left empty handed as children refused to pass him the ball.

Mr Osborne, who admits to hating sport when he was a pupil, visited a primary school in West Yorkshire this morning.

The Chancellor was forced to announce he had missed another crucial economic target yesterday as he has failed to get debt falling.

But in his Budget statement he insisted the public finances were forecast to fall into line by 2020 despite the 'storm clouds' gathering over the economy.

This morning he insisted he would not 'fix the figures' and said he had set out a plan to achieve a Budget surplus of £10billion by the next election.

But the independent Office for Budget Responsibility said Mr Osborne only had a 50/50 chance of making the target, while the Institute for Fiscal Studies predicted more spending cuts and tax rises.

Mr Osborne today told the BBC: 'We have got to hold to the course that we have set out.

'I have set out the plans in the Budget and then a completely independent body which everybody respects - the Office for Budget Responsibility - has looked at those plans and it says, 'If you hold to the course, you deliver those plans.

"If the economy grows as expected, then we will have a surplus towards the end of the parliament'.

'We wouldn't need anything extra like more spending cuts or more tax increases.'

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Mr Osborne later insisted the rules only legally applied in 'normal times' - suggesting a further economic downturn which trashed his targets again would not be his fault.

But the Chancellor was challenged repeatedly on why he had failed to meet two of his three targets and the BBC's John Humphrys asked him: 'What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack?'

NOW HOUSE PRICES SET TO SOAR

House prices will jump by a quarter in the next five years after getting a boost from the Budget, official predictions show.

This would push the average price of a house from £288,000 today to more than £364,000 by 2021, say the Office of Budget Responsibility.

This is much higher than previously thought, and around £4,300 more than its November forecast.

In their Budget analysis, the OBR have credited the new Lifetime Isa for speeding up the rises.

Under the scheme, which was unveiled by the Chancellor this week, the under-40s will get a £1 top-up for every £4 they save towards a house or their retirement.

They can access the cash any time to buy a property worth up to £450,000. The accounts will be available from April next year.

In a lengthy Budget analysis, the OBR said: 'We think [the Lifetime Isa] is more likely than not to lead to higher demand for the relatively fixed supply of housing in the UK and thus lead to higher prices.'

Unlike a pension, where the money is tied up until age 55, they have been designed specifically so that someone can save towards a house deposit.

Tom McPhail, of investment firm Hargreaves Lansdown, said: 'It will take savers a while to build up enough for deposit in the Lifetime Isa, so it will be a few years before we see the impact on house prices, but it will fan the flames.'

The OBR estimated that house prices would jump 26.4 per cent by 2021, with the introduction of the Lifetime Isa responsible for around 0.3 per cent of this.

'The effect could easily be larger if more house deposit saving is channelled through Lifetime Isas than we have assumed,' the report said.

The latest official figures show house prices across Britain are rising at 6.7 per cent a year.

The Chancellor replied: 'The British people hold me to account, the British people can chuck out governments if they don't like them - that's the great thing about the democracy.

'We said we would turn the country around and it's a much stronger place than it was.'

IFS chief Paul Johnson said Mr Osborne had only been able to make the figures add up by 'shuffling money around'.

He warned that the Chancellor would be forced to find 'genuinely big' tax rises or spending cuts if there was any further downgrade in the public finances.

'Within his very tight rule he will probably get away with this this time round. But there's only about a 50-50 shot that he's going to get there,' he told the Today programme.

'If things change again, if the OBR downgrades its forecasts again, I don't think he will be able to get away with anything like this.

'I think he will be forced to put some proper tax increases in or possibly find some yet further proper spending cuts.

'I think this is going to be the last chance he gets to move things around like this without doing anything genuinely big to the public finances.'

In its report for yesterday's Budget, the OBR said the Government was 'more likely than not' to meet its targets - but it warned this judgement was only by a 'small' margin compared to the risks which could blow it off course.

It said the chance of the planned surplus was only 'slightly above 50 per cent'.

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Shadow chief secretary Seema Malhotra said Mr Osborne was 'struggling to explain how his Budget adds up and admits his failures on productivity'.

John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, slammed the Budget today.

He told the BBC: 'We do not believe that the austerity cuts that this government are bringing forward are necessary or, to be frank, are fair.

'Yesterday we made the point that austerity is not an economic necessity it's a political choice and yesterday the Chancellor made his political choices.

'He cut capital gains tax to the richest five per cent of our country and he cut the disability benefits to some of the most vulnerable.

'We would reverse them, it's unacceptable that people with disabilities have to pay for the tax cuts for the rich.'

Yesterday's bad news on the public finances did not stop Mr Osborne announcing a Budget for the 'next generation', which also included a controversial sugar tax to tackle childhood obesity, a lifetime of tax free savings for the young and £1.5billion for education.

A substantial rise in the 40p rate income tax threshold will save middle earners £400 a year.

And 31 million earners across the UK will benefit from a further rise in the personal allowance to £11,500 from next year.

The Chancellor also unveiled a major overhaul of corporation tax that will reduce the headline rate to 17 per cent but close loopholes on multinationals that will raise £9billion.

Small firms will take back about £7billion of the new revenue via reforms to business rates as Mr Osborne promised a 'level playing field' for large and small businesses.

Mr Osborne today defended a £1.2billion cut to disability benefit - described yesterday by Mr McDonnell as 'morally reprehensible'.

The Chancellor said: 'We are increasing the support, increasing the money that is going to disabled people, so that money is going to go up as a budget because we've got to make sure we help the most vulnerable in our society.'

He added: 'We've got to make sure we control our disability budget so that as it rises – and I stress this point – as it rises it absolutely goes to the people in our society who need it most.'

Tory MP Andrew Percy today signalled at Tory unease over the cuts as he suggested a rise in fuel duty would have been a price worth paying to protect the disability element in the personal independence payments (PIP).

He said: 'If I can be honest, I'd rather have a penny or two on fuel if it protects PIP. A point a made in weeks running up to budget.

'The reason I say that is because I do feel if opposing something, we should also identify where else it could be funded from.'

In other developments today, Office for Budget Responsibility chairman Robert Chote undermined Mr Osborne's implication his watchdog had warned against a Brexit vote.

Mr Chote told The Daily Telegraph: 'We are reporting on the weight of views that are expressed outside, we are not saying that we endorse any quantitative estimate and we are very definitely not taking a view on the long-term consequences of In versus Out.'

He added: 'We are not attempting to quantify what the impact of the No vote will be – leaving aside the longer-term issues.

'We just thought it was sensible to recognise the fact that this is a risk – lots of other people are talking about it, they are making attempts to quantify it but we did not want to put our imprimatur on any particular estimate.'

What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack? Osborne is forced to defend himself after missing TWO of his key targets

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George Osborne had to admit the voters could chuck him out over his missed economic targets today after he was asked what would get him the sack.

Revealing grim public finances yesterday, Mr Osborne admitted he was failing to get the debt down as a share of GDP - the second failure after he broke his own cap on welfare spending in November.

Mr Osborne's third target - to have cleared the deficit and be running a surplus by the end of the decade - is in the balance, independent spending watchdogs have warned.

The Chancellor was grilled repeatedly on the missed targets on the BBC Radio 4 Today programme today.

After trying the question several times, exasperated presenter John Humphrys asked him: 'What's a bloke got to do in your job to get the sack?'

The Chancellor replied: 'The British people hold me to account, the British people can chuck out governments if they don't like them - that's the great thing about the democracy.

'We said we would turn the country around and it's a much stronger place than it was.'

Mr Osborne had been defending his plans and the adjustments made in the face of economic challenges - insisting he was the first Chancellor to hold himself to independent standards.

He said: 'I've made adjustments to my plans to make sure debt does fall as a proportion of national income in the coming year; I've made adjustments to my plans to make sure we are going to live within our means and get that surplus.

On welfare spending, yes, I'm the first Chancellor ever to say let's look at what we spend on welfare, let's take action to try and keep within the cap we set.'

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn highlighted Mr Osborne's missed targets when he responded to the Budget in the Commons yesterday.

He said: 'Over the past six years the Chancellor's set targets on deficit, on debt, on productivity, on manufacturing and construction, on exports. He's failed in all of them and he's failing this country.'

George Osborne plans teacher training overhaul to hand more power to headmasters but he faces claims of a £560MILLION black hole in the education budget

Teachers will spend more time in the classroom as part of their training in a major overhaul of how they qualify under radical plans announced by the Government today.

Ministers will scrap the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and replace it with a stronger accreditation process that will be led and assessed by schools.

It will aim to give teachers the same status as doctors and lawyers whereby schools will decide when they are 'fully functioning' teachers.

Headteachers will be given greater powers and will be able to bring in people from other professions under the plans that come a day after George Osborne used his Budget to announce a range of education reforms.

The Chancellor said this morning that reforms to the teacher profession were needed to give children 'a world-class schooling'.

It comes a day after he dedicated his eighth Budget to 'put the next generation first' but he faces claims he has a £560million black hole in his plans to convert all state schools into academies.

The Chancellor announced £140million would go towards funding the pledge but analysis of how much it will cost to convert England's 15,632 remaining state schools into academies has found that the money pledged yesterday will only cover a quarter of the conversion.

Today's announcement will deliver a major shake-up of teacher qualifications and will give headteachers greater power over their workforce, giving them freedom to bring in people from other professions to teach pupils.

The overhaul of teacher training will be included alongside other announcements made this week on converting all schools into academies and extending school days past 3.30pm in a blueprint for reforming England's school system.

Nicky Morgan, the Education Secretary, will introduce the plans to Parliament today.

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She says they will improve standards in teaching and to 'create a fundamentally different education system - an education system fit for the 21st century'.

The QTS will not be replaced with another uniform qualification but instead puts the responsibility for deciding when a teacher qualifies in the hands of schools.

A teacher's school will decide when they are ready to fully qualify and that decision will be reviewed by another school in a peer-led process that mirrors the process of qualification in other professions, such as lawyers.

But it risks reopening the fight that former Education Secretary Michael Gove faced with teacher unions when he introduced plans to allow academies to employ people with no formal teaching qualifications.

He caused outrage with education professionals after allowing schools to hire professionals such as scientists, engineers, musicians and linguists to teach even if they did not have the QTS.

Speaking on a visit to a primary school in West Yorkshire this morning, Mr Osborne said: 'We are announcing today further improvements to our education so that the kids in our country get a world-class schooling.

'So we are going to be changing some of the ways we qualify teachers so that they spend more time in the classroom - above all so that they are recognised for the great profession they are, in the same way for example that doctors are.

'I think it's going to be a welcome improvement in support and training we give to our teaching profession.'

But he was forced to defend an apparent shortfall in the amount of money he has pledged towards 'full academisation' of England's schools.

The average cost of transferring a school to an academy is £45,000 - meaning the whole project will cost £700million.

With just £140million put aside for the academy conversion, it leaves a £560million shortfall.

Labour has warned that the black hole will leave Mr Osborne with no option but to raid the budget for a much-needed increase in school places.

Shadow Education Secretary Lucy Powell said: 'The Chancellor's plans for education are unravelling.

'Schools are already facing an eight per cent cut to their budgets, the first time education spending has fallen since the mid-1990s.

'This half a billion pound black hole in the education budget means that schools will be further out of pocket as a result. The Chancellor needs to come clean about where this money is going to come from.'

Tory MPs rally a rebellion against Osborne's £1.2billion slashing of disability benefits - and one even suggests raising fuel duty to cover the cost

George Osborne faced growing Tory dissent over his cuts to disability benefit today as a letter circulated urging him to change course.

In an echo of the damaging row over tax credits last year, Brigg and Goole MP Andrew Percy said higher petrol duty would have been a price worth paying to protect vulnerable people.

The Chancellor confirmed the cuts in yesterday's benefit and today insisted it was to ensure the disability budget was spent helping the most needy.

Mr Osborne said the overall budget for supporting disabled people was rising.

No 10 today pointed to a study which showed 96 per cent of disabled people who need support would be better served by one off payments instead of a weekly allowance.

Tory MP Andrew Percy today signalled at Tory unease over the cuts as he suggested a rise in fuel duty would have been a price worth paying to protect the disability element in the personal independence payments (PIP).

He said: 'If I can be honest, I'd rather have a penny or two on fuel if it protects PIP. A point a made in weeks running up to budget.

'The reason I say that is because I do feel if opposing something, we should also identify where else it could be funded from.'

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He later told the BBC: 'The way in which this has been presented for one and the way in which this is a catch-all and is really more about the welfare cap than about welfare reform means that this hits exactly the wrong people potentially.

'I think it sends out the wrong message about the priorities of the Government.'

Mr Percy continued: 'There are some changes within the whole package that you can argue that about, but the fact is the package as a whole goes too far.

"I think the savings that it makes are not appropriate and I don't think can be justified so it's just not acceptable now.'

Shadow chancellor John McDonnell yesterday dubbed the cuts as 'morally reprehensible' and shadow work and pensions work and pensions secretary Owen Smith today continued the attack.

He said: 'The truth is the Tories have targeted thirty billion pounds worth of cuts on disabled people since 2010.

'These latest cuts, hitting those who need help managing toilet needs and getting dressed, are beyond cruel'.

Asked on BBC Breakfast about whether cuts to PIP were harming the most vulnerable in society, Mr Osborne said: 'We have got to make sure we have a system that works.

'I'm always happy to listen to proposals about how improve on that but we have got to control our disability budget and make sure help goes to the people who need it most.'

Mr Osborne added: ' 'We are increasing the support, increasing the money that is going to disabled people, so that money is going to go up as a budget because we've got to make sure we help the most vulnerable in our society.'

He added: 'We've got to make sure we control our disability budget so that as it rises – and I stress this point – as it rises it absolutely goes to the people in our society who need it most.'

The Prime Minister's official spokeswoman added: 'The Government are clear on why we are proposing these changes.

'Spending on main disability benefits has gone up and we don't think the personal independence payment is working as well as it could at making sure the money that is going into this is being focused on the right people.'

She added: 'Health professionals were asked to review cases where people qualified for personal independence payments based on the need for aid and applicances for their disability.

'What they found was in 96% of cases they were unlikely to have ongoing extra costs - so for example they might have needed to have a hand toilet rail fitted in their home.

'Once that was completed they were unlikely to need significant extra costs over a sustained period that would justify a weekly allowance.'

Tampon tax is at the centre of fresh Tory infighting over Europe as Brexit MPs join with Labour to threaten Budget rebellion over Brussel's 5% levy on the 'luxury item'

The so-called 'tampon tax' emerged at the centre of a fresh Tory row over Europe today as scores of Conservative MPs threatened to impose embarrassing amendments to George Osborne's Budget.

A 5 per cent VAT levy is charged on female sanitary products and is administered by officials in Brussels.

It means the UK Chancellor cannot decide to scrap the £12million tax raised from the tax and cannot even change the rate at which it is charged.

Eurosceptic Tory MPs are joining with Labour MPs, who have tabled an amendment to the Commons vote on the measures set out in yesterday's Budget.

If successful, the amendment would mean the 5 per cent sanitary product tax could be struck off the Budget resolutions - but that would break EU rules.

It would give Brexit campaigners a powerful example of how the UK is constrained by the EU and left powerless to change even the smallest changes to VAT.

However Mr Osborne said this morning that Britain was on the verge of a deal with Brussels which would allow it to scrap the 'tampon tax', although opposition from the French may scupper the plans.

In yesterday's Budget he admitted he could not scrap the 'tampon tax' but pledged to allocate all the £12million revenue from the levy to women's charities such as Breast Cancer Care and the White Ribbon Campaign, which helps victims of domestic violence.

Labour MP Paula Sherriff, who tabled the amendment, said the levy on female sanitary tax was a 'tax on women'.

'The fact that tampons are taxed at 5 per cent suggests they're a luxury item. I can't think of anything less luxurious,' she said.

Tory Eurosceptic MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan said she was joining the rebellion against the continued 5 per cent 'tampon tax' because it was a 'fundamental' breach of British sovereignty that the Chancellor was poweless to act on the issue.

'The people we elect should be responsible for setting the taxes in this country – not unelected EU judges and bureaucrats,' she said.

'It is a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation, which is what we now have.'

'Our Chancellor is unable to take this decision that will benefit women because VAT is controlled by the EU. The only way to get this change is to Vote Leave on 23 June.'

Mr Osborne will be hoping that Brussels grants an opt-out for Britain to scrap the levy before MPs vote on the Budget measures next week.

John Bercow, the Speaker of the Commons, will decide whether to accept the amendment for the vote on March 22.

But it may not be necessary if Mr Osborne wins agreement from Brussels.

Speaking this morning, he said: 'I perfectly understand people's anger at paying the tampon tax.

'I said we would get agreement that we could reduce this rate to zero. I think we are on the verge of getting that agreement. I think we are going to get that agreement in the next few days, we hope.'

Plans to expand Britain's crematoria are being considered to ensure they meet the demands of Hindu and Sikh funerals

Plans to expand crematoria are being considered after concerns were raised over the failure to cater for Hindu and Sikh communities.

Ministers are carrying out a review of crematoria facilities to ensure they meet the demand and cultural requirements of Britain's diverse communities.

Fears have been raised that sites across the UK are failing to accommodate Hindu and Sikh cremations, where traditionally larger numbers of mourners wish to attend.

Complaints have also been made about the failure of crematorium staff to pay sufficient regard to the 'cultural sensitivities of different faiths at a difficult time for mourners'.

The Government's is seeking the advice of faith groups, members of the public as well as providers of crematoria and local authorities and private firms to decide whether reforms are needed.

The consultation states: 'Some faith groups have said that crematoria staff need better training to ensure that they are culturally aware and sensitive to different faiths at a difficult time for mourners.'

News of the review of crematoria provision was slipped out by the Government in yesterday's Budget. It will run until May 26.

The review comes after it emerged last year that the cost of a cremation in Britain has soared by a third over the last five years.

The average cost of a cremation at a public crematorium now stands at £640, compared to £480 in 2010.

More than 170 local authorities run at least one crematorium, while in other areas they are managed by private firms.

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In some areas - such as Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria - the cost of cremating an adult has risen by more than doubled - from £359 in 2010 to £721 today.

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News
PM wins tampon tax cut in summer

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BUDGET CHAOS 3

WOMEN should be able to buy VAT-free sanitary products by the summer after the PM begged EU leaders to relax the rules on the tampon tax.

The Commission agreed to bring forward proposals allowing flexibility in tax rates.

It paves the way for Britain to scrap the five per cent VAT rate on tampons, by bringing in a zero rate in next week's Finance Bill.

The Queen is then expected to give the new law royal assent in July.

The PM, who was forced to use a Brussels crisis summit on migration to highlight the tampon tax, said the announcement showed "that when we fight for things in Europe, we can get things done".

Eurosceptics had threatened a Commons revolt. They yesterday insisted EU leaders could still veto the changes.

The Sun Says — Page Ten

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News
PM wins tampon tax KO in summer

STEVE HAWKES
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WOMEN should be able to buy VAT-free sanitary products by the summer after the PM begged EU leaders to relax the rules on the tampon tax.

The Commission agreed to bring forward proposals allowing flexibility in tax rates.

It paves the way for Britain to scrap the five per cent VAT on tampons, by bringing in a zero rate as part of next week's Finance Bill.

The Queen is then expected to give the new law royal assent in July.

Mr Cameron, who was forced to use a Brussels crisis summit on migration to highlight the tampon tax, said the announcement showed "that when we fight for things in Europe, we can get things done".

Eurosceptics yesterday insisted EU leaders could still veto the changes.

Meanwhile, more than 40 Tory MPs were last night tipped to join a Labour rebellion over VAT on solar panels.

The Sun Says — Page Ten

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The Daily Telegraph

Editorial; Opinion Columns
The Chancellor has been disabled by his overriding political ambition

CHARLES MOORE
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The row over disability benefits reveals a deeper problem for Mr Osborne: voters are fed up with him

At the risk - no, the certainty - of being accused of hardheartedness, let me caution against believing every word you hear from disability campaigners. There is no group (except for cyclists) whose selfappointed representatives are more shrilly moralistic.

Listening to all the fuss about the Government's proposed changes to Personal Independence Payments (PIPs), the ordinary, decent citizen might assume that disabled people will suddenly be rendered destitute by the announcement in this week's Budget. That same citizen has not been told why this change is considered necessary.

PIPs work on a points system. The points are given for the "aids and appliances" the claimant needs. Various court cases have hugely widened the definition of aids and appliances. Thus someone who has to sit on a bed to put on his socks is now legally empowered to claim the bed as an appliance. As a result of such decisions, the number of aids and appliances claimed trebled in 18 months. The accumulation of enough of them - some of which, like an electric tin opener, cost very little - then qualifies a claimant for a substantial regular benefit.

This is what policy wonks called "system learning" - working out, usually without cheating, how to claim more. It expands the pool of claimants far beyond what the legislators intended. That way lies ruin.

Obviously, any government responsible for ever-growing welfare budgets must try to restrain such trends. In the case of PIPs and daily living allowances, more than £15 billion is spent and more than 3.5 million people claim. Like virtually all "cuts" ever criticised, the changes to PIPs are not really cuts: the amount spent will still rise in the coming years, but by less than would otherwise have happened. Some control has to be exercised.

So no, George Osborne should not be screamed at for "helping the rich on the backs of the vulnerable". The interesting question, though, is 'Why is there such a strong reaction this time?' The PIPs are squeaking so successfully that the Government is now beginning to back away.

The answer, surely, is that people are - in a more general sort of way - fed up with the Chancellor.

They are right to be. For far too long now, Mr Osborne has been weaving in and out, triangulating, spinning. In his Budget speech on Wednesday, he boasted about £12 million he was allocating from the "tampon tax" to various women's charities. This remark raised two questions: 1. Why should government tax people and give their money to charities, rather than not tax them and let them help charities themselves? 2. Why are we paying a tampon tax anyway? Neither question need have arisen if Mr Osborne had not thought up this cheap little gimmick.

The answer to question two is important. Women pay a tampon tax (VAT on sanitary products) because the European Union, not our own Parliament, controls our indirect taxation. By drawing attention to this embarrassing fact, Mr Osborne forced David Cameron to grovel to Jean-Claude Juncker at the summit in Brussels to beg a concession on the point in time for the referendum on June 23.

Again, in his speech, Mr Osborne announced: "I am not prepared to look back at my time here in this Parliament, doing this job, and say to my children's generation: 'I'm sorry. We knew there was a problem with sugary drinks. We knew it caused disease. But we ducked the problem and did nothing'." Anyone acquainted with the amusing and cynical Mr Osborne knows that he would happily have ducked the problem of sugary drinks (as he has already done for six years), unless he considered it politically convenient.

Surely he would be better employed worrying whether he will have to say to his children's generation: "I was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I'm sorry: I should have analysed the profound changes in the global economy which altered almost everything, but instead I treated the job as a political game. I passed a ridiculous and unenforceable law telling myself that I had to achieve surplus over the cycle, and I then failed to do this. I undermined private pensions. I was tougher on the middle class than on the big boys. I invented the Office of Tax Simplification but added five times more pages to the tax code than the length of the entire document 50 years ago. I wasted my time copying Gordon Brown - trying to wrong-foot the Opposition, planning headlines and building up a system of patronage so that I could become prime minister."

Perhaps I am being harsh. Under Mr Brown, we were borrowing £300,000 a minute. Under Mr Osborne, the figure is a mere £140,000 a minute (though now rising). He does not have Mr Brown's "psychological flaws". He has not trashed the British economy. He has succeeded, in part, in reducing the numbers in the public sector. Under him, economic growth did finally return. He has also - a unique achievement in modern times - maintained an effective relationship with the Prime Minister throughout.

But the problem is that he is still there. Mr Osborne always acknowledged privately that one should not outstay one's welcome in the job. After the last election, wise counsellors suggested to him that he would be better off moving to the Foreign Office, but he could not bear to surrender the system of control which he had built up. He remained at 1 Horse Guards long enough to be trapped by needing to justify (or bury) whatever he had done before; long enough to get stuck.

Ambition for the premiership is not, in itself, a vice. But for a Chancellor of the Exchequer to succeed, people have to believe that the holder of the office will tell politically uncomfortable truths when necessary. Geoffrey Howe wanted to be prime minister much more than most people realised, but he was an exemplary Chancellor because he maintained a public and private persona of quiet rectitude rather than personal or political opportunism. Nigel Lawson, though he came unstuck towards the end, showed his mastery of the subject and a commitment to coherent reform. Even Mr Brown had his "prudence with a purpose", until power-lust jettisoned the former and perverted the latter.

Mr Osborne has never managed to convince us that he has a purpose beyond political success. The very fact that he is constantly photographed in a safety helmet and hi-vis jacket is a reminder of how much he needs to persuade us he is what he isn't. Now that his attempt to be leader is coming close, he babbles about education, and is forever filmed laughing with children in classrooms. Such sequences just make him look like a sophisticated robot.

Just now, he is trying to persuade us to vote to stay in the EU. For this purpose, he has pushed forward or touted (sometimes without their agreement) whatever famous experts - the Governor of the Bank of England, the Office for Budget Responsibility - he can find to make his arguments. The trouble is that his case for the EU is now so inextricably bound up with the case for G.Osborne in 10 Downing Street that both are discredited.

COMMENT on Charles Moore's view at telegraph.co.uk/comment

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DailyMail.com

News

TAMPON TAX WILL BE AXED THIS SUMMER

BY DANIEL MARTIN AND JASON GROVES

623 words
19 March 2016
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2
English

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THE tampon tax will be abolished by the summer, George Osborne announced last night.

The Chancellor said that legislation for a zero rate of VAT on women's sanitary products will be introduced next week as part of the Finance Bill.

The move came after David Cameron was forced to beg EU chief Jean-Claude Juncker for permission to reduce the rate from the current 5 per cent minimum allowed under Brussels rules.

The prime minister had to use a European summit on the migrant crisis to plead for help on reducing British rates on female sanitary products.

The issue has proved highly embarrassing for the Prime Minister and the Chancellor as they try to convince voters to remain in the EU.

Last night Mr Cameron claimed: 'It shows that when we fight for things in Europe, we can get things done.'

The Finance Bill, which implements the Budget, will be introduced in the Commons next week - and will come into force when the Queen gives it her royal assent.

This is likely to happen by the time the Commons goes off for its summer recess in July.

The Chancellor hailed the announcement as a 'major victory for fairness' - and said it proved the value of having a seat at Europe's top table.

EU leaders, meeting in Brussels, agreed a deal on Thursday night to allow the UK to scrap the tampon tax.

Eurosceptic backbench MPs have been threatening a rebellion over the tax, currently at the lowest rate allowed by EU law, following the Budget.

Mr Osborne said: 'We've used our seat at the top table in Europe to secure what the British public has demanded - common sense on VAT and an end to the tampon tax.

'I said last year we were committed to getting the EU rules changed, and until that happened we would use the money raised to fund women's health and support charities.

'That means £17million for good causes - and now we're acting to ensure that women see the difference at the till.'

Sanitary products sold in the UK incur VAT at a rate of 5 per cent - the lowest allowed under VAT law by the EU.

On Thursday night EU leaders said reforms would be unveiled next week that will allow the UK to change its rate. In a joint statement, they said that their proposals would 'provide the option to member states of VAT zero rating for sanitary products'.

Eurosceptic MPs said the row highlighted the extent to which Brussels is able to overrule British sovereignty.

Campaigners have fought for years for the tampon tax to be removed, arguing sanitary products are a necessity not a luxury - and should therefore not attract VAT.

More than 300,000 people have signed a petition calling on the government to act.

Last night Mr Cameron, in Brussels, said: 'The key breakthrough, which is being able to have flexibility on zero rates, has come about. I was glad I was able to get agreement from 27 other countries and the European Commission.

He added: 'It shows that when we fight for things in Europe, we can get things done.'

The European Commission said it was working on two options that would allow its member states to have greater flexibility over the setting of VAT rates.

'EU VAT rules are not imposed by the European Commission,' a spokesman said, adding: 'They are decided on and agreed unanimously by member states.

'Zero rates are an exception and run against generally accepted VAT principles.

'Most member states tax sanitary products like tampons at around 20 per cent or more.'

Disability climbdown - Page 8

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News
Tampon tax is scrapped

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THE tampon tax will be scrapped from the summer after EU leaders struck a deal to end the levy.

A plan due to be published on Wednesday by the European Commission will give members greater flexibility in setting zero rates of tax.

Speaking in Brussels last night, David Cameron said: "We are now a step closer to stopping this tampon tax once and for all."

Axing the 5% VAT on the essential products will be included in the Finance Bill on Tuesday as MPs debate George Osborne's Budget.

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The Daily Telegraph

News
PM hails Osborne for driving through all his flagship reforms

Steven Swinford
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Tories in crisis

Praise for achievements of IDS too as Cameron tries to steady the party before Chancellor's speech today

DAVID CAMERON has said that none of the Government's flagship reforms would have been possible without George Osborne as he insisted that the Conservative party is a "compassionate one nation Government".

The Prime Minister sought to defuse a bitter row in the wake of the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith by praising the Chancellor for "turning our economy around".

He also said that Mr Duncan Smith had made an "enormous" contribution to the Government as he rejected claims at the weekend by the former Work and Pension Secretary that the Government risks dividing rather than uniting society.

Mr Cameron's show of support for Mr Osborne comes as the Chancellor was openly criticised by fellow Conservative MPs over plans to cut disability benefits by £1.3billion.

Mr Osborne will today face one of the defining moments of his career in the House of Commons when the Finance Bill is discussed as he seeks to win back the confidence of scores of furious Conservative MPs and revive his ambitions to succeed Mr Cameron as leader.

The Government made two climbdowns before the Chancellor's speech as it said it would not vote against Tory rebels who are calling for the end of the so-called "tampon tax" and opposing plans to raise VAT on solar panels from 5 per cent to 20 per cent.

PM 'has confidence' in Mr Osborne

The Prime Minister found himself defending his long-term ally and friend yesterday amid claims that he had criticised Mr Osborne over the handling of disability benefit cuts.

In the morning the Prime Minister's official spokeswoman denied the rift, insisting that the Prime Minister "absolutely" has confidence in the Chancellor.

Despite the Government's decision not to push ahead with welfare cuts, the attacks on Mr Osborne continued.

Sarah Wollaston, a Conservative MP and the chairman of the health select committee, said on BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Mr Osborne should "revise" his Budget. She urged ministers to consider cuts to pensioner benefits to end "inter-generational unfairness".

Chloe Smith, a former economic secretary to the Treasury who was savaged by Jeremy Paxman in 2012 as she sought to defend Mr Osborne's "omnishambles" Budget, criticised her former boss.

She said that Mr Osborne was "ultimately responsible" for the disability benefit cuts and suggested that the benefits of "well-off pensioners" should be curbed.

Labour call Chancellor a 'chicken'

John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, was granted an urgent question to ask about the Government's decision to back down on cuts to disability benefits.

However Labour was left furious when they learnt that David Gauke, a Treasury minister, would be answering questions in the Commons instead of the Chancellor.

It emerged that Mr Osborne was spending the day in the Treasury preparing his speech for the end of the Budget debate today.

He will be the first Chancellor to wrap up the Budget debate since Ken Clarke in 1994, when the then Conservative Government was defeated over plans to hike VAT on domestic heat and lighting.

Labour accused Mr Osborne of being a "chicken", but Mr Gauke described the attacks as "pompous nonsense". Conservative MPs in the house lined up in support of Mr Osborne and the Government.

"We are a one nation Government

The Prime Minister used his statement on last week's summit to mount a signifcant defence of Mr Osborne and the Government's record. Mr Duncan Smith had used a series of interviews after his resignation to suggest the Conservatives do not care about the poor because they do not vote for them.

In a conciliatory address, Mr Cameron praised Mr Duncan Smith for his "enormous" contribution to the Government and said he could be "proud of what he achieved".

Mr Cameron said: "This government will continue to give the highest priority to improving the life chances of the poorest in our country. We will con-tinue to reform our schools. We will continue to fund childcare and create the jobs.

"We will carry on cutting taxes for the lowest paid - in the last parliament we took 4 million of the lowest paid out of income tax altogether and our further rises to the personal allowance will exempt millions more.

"All of this is driven by a deeply held conviction that everyone in Britain should have the chance to make the most of their lives."

Turned around the British economy

Mr Cameron concluded by saying that "none of this would be possible" without Mr Osborne, who he hailed for "turning our economy around". He said: "We must continue to cut the defi-cit, control the cost of welfare, and live within our means. We must not burden our children and grandchildren with debts we didn't have the courage to pay off ourselves.We can only improve life chances if our economy is secure and strong. Securing our economy, extending opportunity: We will continue with this approach in full because we are a modern, compassionate, One Nation Conservative Government."

Turning to criticism from Labour about Mr Osborne's absence, he joked: "You have got the First Lord of the Treasury today [himself], you're going to have the Second Lord of the Treasury [Mr Osborne] tomorrow and when it comes to holes in the budget we could perhaps hear from the Time Lords that sit opposite because they left us the biggest black hole there ever was."

Mr Cameron added: "We will go on with our plans to rebuild sink estates to help those with mental health conditions to extend our troubled families programme to reform our prisons and to tackle discrimination for those whose life chances suffer because of the colour of their skin."

In an update on the Brussels summit, Mr Cameron said: "I took the opportunity to deal with a long-standing issue we have had about the VAT rate on sanitary products. We have some EU-wide VAT rules in order to make the single market work. But the system has been far too inflexible and this causes understandable frustration. We said we would get this changed - and that is exactly what we've done." He added: "On this basis, the Government will be accepting both the amendments put down to the Finance Bill."

Budget defeat Seven Tory rebels knifed Ken Clarke

The last Budget defeat in the Commons was in 1994 when Ken Clarke's decision to increase VAT on domestic fuel and power was voted down. In the hours before the vote Chancellor Clarke became so desperate to win round Tory rebels he offered £120million to boost pensioner benefits with a home insulation package. Just three of the 10 original rebels backed down, leaving seven to help Labour defeat the Government.

As the vote approached Mr Clarke pleaded: "It would be quite reckless for this House, having been taken so far on the road to lasting recovery, to suddenly decide that it cannot stay the course". He returned to the Commons after the defeat with new tax and spend measures.

Troublespots Fallout from the Budget

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Disability benefit cuts

The decision to cut £4.3billion worth of disability benefits prompted the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith. The cuts, later reversed after a backlash from Conservative MPs, focused on disabled people who needed help washing and dressing themselves. IDS suggested the Conservatives were treating the welfare budget like a "pot of money".

Sugar tax

Sugary drinks will be taxed in an attempt to reduce childhood obesity and encourage manufacturers to develop healthier products. The Institute for Fiscal Studies warned the move may just prompt children to pick up a chocolate bar rather than a can of Coke. There are also fears that drink companies may swallow the levy rather than pass it on to consumers.

Lifetime Isas

Young workers will be encouraged to build up savings for their first home and their retirement with a "lifetime Isa". Ros Altmann, the pensions minister, warned the move could leave millions of people worse off in their retirement and suggested it could encourage people to withdraw all their pension fund money from their pensions when they retire, instead of saving it for later in life. The IFS has suggested that people are likely to get a better return from a pension.

Capital gains tax and 40p rate

The Chancellor has been criticised for favouring the better off at the expense of the poor by announcing large cuts to capital gains tax and an increase in the threshold at which people start to pay the 40p rate of income tax. Both favour higher earners.

Tampon tax Conservative MPs were planning a revolt over the Government's failure to scrap the so-called "tampon tax". Under EU rules a VAT rate of 5 per cent has to be applied to sanitary products. However the PM secured agreement in Brussels that it could be "zero rated" and said it would not oppose an amendment by Tory MPs.

Solar panels A second rebellion by Tory MPs was planned over VAT hikes on solar panels after the European Court of Justice ruled they should be taxed at 20 per cent, not 5 per cent. The Government yesterday announced it will not oppose an amendment being tabled by Tory rebels because the Government's existing policy is to keep the lower rate.

Fuel duty

George Osborne rejected calls to raise fuel duty, despite the collapse in world oil prices, after lobbying by ministers and MPs. However some Tory MPs said they would have preferred a hike instead of the plans to cut disability benefits.

Pensioner benefits

In the run-up to the Budget, the Chancellor was forced to retreat on plans to scrap higher rate tax relief on pensions after a backlash from Conservative MPs. He also left pensioner benefits untouched. IDS claimed Mr Osborne was protecting pensioners at the expense of the poorest in society.

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theguardian

Opinion
Should the tampon tax be used to help domestic violence victims?

Rose George and Caroline Criado-Perez
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Is the chancellor's plan to give tax from sanitary products to women's services a thoughtful move or a low bribe? Rose George and Caroline Criado-Perez debate

Rose George : A devious plan painting domestic violence as solely a women's issue There it is, just behind my toilet, in a discreet washbag. The means for women who are being brutalised, raped, assaulted by men (in 2011-2012, according to the CPS, 94% of defendants in violence against women cases were men) to be protected, by a small piece of cotton that I stick up my vagina to deal with an unavoidable biological event.

That a tampon should be taxed is baffling and infuriating enough. But that George Osborne has chosen to divert the £15m raised by the " tampon tax " (actually VAT on what is ridiculously called "feminine hygiene") towards funding women's shelters and refuges is even more so.

Related: Tampon tax: men should share the burden of ending domestic abuse

It's brilliant really, because how can I be against women's services getting funding, when their money has been slashed, when the amazing Eaves and their Poppy project have had to close ? Refuge's funding has dropped 80% in four years. How churlish it would be to object to them getting money, even though it's money they should have been getting in the first place; even though it's money that is coming from a woman-only tax.

Women will now fund services that protect them from violence perpetrated almost entirely by men. Hey, men, not only do you not have to pay for violence that you inflict on women, but when we get raped, abused or brutalised, we won't cost the state anything either! What message is that sending other than violence against women is some kind of "women's issue"? It's not. It's largely a male issue.

So, Gideon, don't stop at the tampon tax. Get £15m from a tax on Gillette Mach 3 or that Friday pint or on the wages of Premier League footballers, who could lavishly fund women's services and not notice. But that won't happen, and Osborne has made it almost impossible to object to his apparently generous announcement. And that is just bloody devious.

Caroline Criado-Perez : While this tax exists, I'd rather money raised supported vulnerable women No one can deny that the symbolism is dreadful. The "luxury" tax that women pay to mop up the bleeding from their wombs will now be used to mop up the women who've been assaulted or raped. Rather than turning the #tampontax into blood money, cuts to the women's services sector made since the Tories came to power should be reversed.

According to Women's Aid between 2010 and 2014, 32 specialist refuge services closed down; 10 specialist domestic violence services across England closed between April and July 2014. Polly Neate, who is chief executive of the charity, told me about a refuge in Bromley that has had its funding cut in half – on average its manager now has to turn away 10 women a day for each bed-space she is able to provide.

Related: Periods cost £18,000? Here are five things I'd rather spend the money on | Daisy Buchanan

On the other hand, £15m is not to be sniffed at. Neate estimates that the women's services sector costs about £100m a year – and although this new revenue stream is not solely aimed at violence against women, it will still make a material difference. The £2m that has already been allocated to Women's Aid will be spent on an early intervention programme, which, Neate says, they simply didn't have the funds to do before.

We might all agree that it is deeply objectionable to class sanitary products as luxury items, while flapjacks and crocodile meat are counted as "essential" and therefore exempt from tax. But the reality is that the

chancellor’s hands are tied. Under EU rules he simply cannot unilaterally zero-rate tampons. It is something that must be agreed in Brussels.

Until EU rules can be changed, I’d rather this tax on being female went towards providing services for vulnerable women. And in the long-term, we will continue to fight for proper funding for domestic violence services – and an end to the tampon tax.

* This piece has been amended to remove Rose George’s claim that razors are not taxed. They are, at 20%

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Money
David Cameron faces possible Commons defeat on 'tampon tax'

Rowena Mason Political correspondent
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Tory rebels may vote with opposition to demand moves to override EU rules and end VAT on women's sanitary products

David Cameron faces the possibility of a Commons defeat over the "tampon tax" as a group of Tories prepares to vote with Labour and other opposition parties to demand a strategy to end the VAT on sanitary items.

The attempt to get rid of the 5% VAT rate is led by Labour MP Paula Sherriff, who is tabling an amendment to the finance bill. Cameron has argued that the EU sets the rules and it would be difficult to get them overturned.

During the election campaign, he said: "I wish we could get rid of this … There's a problem with getting rid of VAT on certain individual issues because of the way this tax is regulated and set in Europe."

Sherriff's amendment, however, would force George Osborneto set out how he would negotiate the end of VAT on sanitary products within three months. The chancellor would also have to update the Commons on his progress.

It will be up to the Speaker to decide which amendments to call, but if it is selected, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and a number of anti-EU Tories are likely to vote in favour of it.

The likely Tory rebels have held up the "tampon tax" as an example of the EU having too much influence over domestic taxation. Ukip also opposes the VAT rate, calling it a tax on women.

Alison Thewliss, an SNP MP, has tabled a separate amendment that would commit the Treasury to publishing a report setting out the impact of exempting women's sanitary products from VAT.

"The SNP has long called for the abolition of the unfair tampon tax, and after five years of inaction from this Tory government it's time for George Osborne to set out when we can expect the VAT rules to be changed," Thewliss said.

"Sanitary protection products are not an optional luxury. They are an essential product for over half the population. It is absurd that while men's razors, children's nappies and even products like Jaffa Cakes, exotic meats and edible cake decorations are free from VAT, women are still having to pay additional costs on what is already an expensive yet vital product."

More than 250,000 people have signed a Change.org petition calling for the issue to be addressed. It says: "David Cameron has accepted that removing sanitary tax will be 'very difficult to do but I'll have to go away and have a look and come back to you'. Well, Mr Cameron, it's time for a response. We need to know why the government still taxes sanitary products on luxurious, 'non-essential' grounds, but not helicopters, the maintenance of our private jets, or crocodile steaks."

Labour reduced VAT on sanitary products from 17.5% to 5% in 2000 but could not go any further under EU rules.

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theguardian

Politics
Tampon tax: supermarkets pledge to pass on tax saving

Mark Leftly
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Major supermarkets and Boots vow to reduce price of sanitary products following government's proposed scrapping of VAT

The big four supermarkets in Britain have pledged to save women hundreds of pounds on sanitary products over the course of their lifetimes following the government's promise to scrap the so-called tampon tax, the Guardian can reveal.

Tesco, Asda and Morrisons have written to Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP who led the parliamentary campaign to scrap the 5% VAT on sanitary products, confirming that the price tag will be reduced in line with the abolition of the levy. A spokeswoman for Sainsbury's told the Guardian that this was "definitely" its plan.

Smaller rival Waitrose and the high street chemist Boots have confirmed they will do likewise.

David Cameron confirmed in March he would end the VAT charge after facing a backbench rebellion backing a Labour finance bill amendment to introduce a zero rate.

The Eurosceptic Conservative rebels were angry that EU rules meant individual countries could not abolish VAT on selected products. The UK and other countries pushed for a relaxation of the rules.

Brussels has since announced options to permit a zero rate on sanitary products, which campaigners believe are a basic need that should not be subject to VAT.

The chancellor, George Osborne, had proposed to redistribute the estimated £15m a year in VAT to women's charities but agreed to scrap the levy entirely when the European commission changed its stance.

However, there were concerns such savings would not be passed on to consumers: France recently reduced its VAT rate on sanitary products from 20% to 5.5% but French prices have remained broadly similar.

Sherriff said: "I'm delighted to have reached this agreement with Britain's largest retailers that they will guarantee to pass on the tampon tax cut at the point of sale. It would be completely unacceptable if this measure just led to big businesses boosting their bottom line at the expense of women buying what are essential goods.

"I will be pressing some of the smaller chains to sign up to the same deal and for the manufacturers to recognise the cut in their recommended retail price.

"If for any reason we don't get full agreement to this voluntary deal, I am prepared to push the case for the finance bill to include powers to impose a windfall tax in future."

Osborne has yet to set a deadline for the abolition. Sherriff will table a further amendment to the bill setting a firm date if the government does not set out its own timetable soon. This is again expected to attract cross-party support.

In its letter to Sherriff, Morrisons' head of policy and corporate affairs, David Scott, said: "This [reduction] is designed to directly benefit women and I am pleased to confirm that Morrisons will be passing the 5% reduction on to our customers when the relevant regulations come into force."

Una Kent, communications director at Boots, told Sherriff that the chain would "absolutely" reflect the abolition in its pricing and added: "It's encouraging to see these proactive steps being taken to help essential sanitary items become more accessible for all women."

Writing on behalf of Asda’s chief executive, Andy Clarke, the senior director for corporate affairs, Chris Lowe, told Sherriff that abolishing the tax is a policy that the Walmart-owned supermarket “has long campaigned for and was the top action our Asda mums said they would like the government to take”.

Sherriff is also concerned that continued financial pressure on poorer families following the financial crisis has forced some women to visit food banks to get tampons, a situation likely to be the focus of a forthcoming campaign.

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UK news
MPs plan budget rebellion against tampon tax

Heather Stewart Political editor
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Alliance of feminists and pro-Brexit MPs back Labour's Paula Sherriff in attempting to amend George Osborne's finance bill

George Osborne is facing a potential rebellion over the "tampon tax" next week, from an alliance of feminists and campaigners for Britain to leave the European Union.

Labour backbencher Paula Sherriff, who has waged a campaign against the 5% VAT charged on sanitary products, has laid an amendment to the budget resolution enacting the chancellor's tax plans. If implemented, it would allow MPs to strike down the tampon tax when the finance bill is debated later this month.

Sherriff has won the support of Eurosceptic Conservative backbenchers, who resent the fact that Brussels rules prevent Britain from altering the scope of VAT.

Conservative Anne-Marie Trevelyan, who is campaigning for Britain to leave the EU after the referendum on 23 June, said: "The people we elect should be responsible for setting the taxes in this country – not unelected EU judges and bureaucrats. It is a fundamental principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation, which is what we now have."

"Our chancellor is unable to take this decision that will benefit women because VAT is controlled by the EU. The only way to get this change is to Vote Leave on 23 June."

Sherriff, the MP for Dewsbury since last year's general election, said: "I genuinely feel really passionate about this. It's a tax on women. The fact that tampons are taxed at 5% suggests they're a luxury item. I can't think of anything less luxurious."

Osborne sought to assuage backbenchers' anger over the tax in his autumn statement in November by allocating the £15m of revenue raised to a series of charities that benefit women. In his budget speech he said £12m had already been set aside to causes including Breast Cancer Care.

But Eurosceptic backbenchers, of whom there are more than 100, could decide to make trouble for the chancellor by supporting the amendment.

The scale of unrest on Conservative backbenchers was underlined last week when the government suffered an embarrassing defeat over plans to liberalise Sunday trading rules, which had been spearheaded by the chancellor.

Sherriff insisted she would not rest until sanitary products are zero-rated for VAT. The speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, will decide whether to accept the amendment, which could be the subject of a vote on 22 March.

Labour's shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, Seema Malhotra, has pointed to leaked documents suggesting the European commission is considering proposals that would hand back powers to the chancellor, allowing him to abolish the tax. Sherriff called on him to prioritise the issue in negotiations with Brussels.

Alison Thewliss, the SNP MP for Glasgow Central and another member of the 2015 intake, is another supporter of the amendment.

Leave campaigners have sought to win over feminists to their cause, with Eurosceptic employment minister Priti Patel even comparing those urging a no vote in June's referendum with the suffragettes who fought for women to be given the vote.

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theguardian

Politics
New DWP secretary Stephen Crabb says no further welfare cuts planned – as it happened

Andrew Sparrow
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Rolling coverage of the latest developments in the Tory internal warfare following Iain Duncan Smith's resignation, including David Cameron 's Commons statementNo 10 lobby briefing - Full summaryLunchtime summaryCameron's statement - Snap verdictEarly evening summary

block-time published-time 7.23pm GMT

Early evening summary

* Stephen Crabb has used his debut performance at the despatch box as work and pensions secretary to announce that the government has no plans for further welfare cuts this parliament. Addressing MPs he said "we won't be seeking alternative offsetting savings [for the £4.4bn over four years that the DWP will lose because it is not going ahead with the Personal Independence Payment cuts] and as a government we are not seeking further savings from the welfare budget." Labour MPs subsequently said that this did not amount to a cast-iron commitment not to make any further welfare cuts before the 2020 election, and a Treasury briefing suggested that the government is keeping the option of further cuts open. But charities welcomed the announcement as a serious statement of intent. The Child Poverty Action Group said:

Stephen Crabb is to be congratulated for halting the PIP cuts and saying that there will be no more social security cuts this parliament...

Ministers must now consult on the next steps for welfare reform to ensure that the lowest income households do not continue to subsidise gains for better off groups.

And the disability charity Scope said:

Disabled people will be relieved that the new secretary of state used his first speech to confirm that there are no plans to make further welfare cuts and that he would like to start a new conversation with disabled people.

* Ministers have refused to say how the government will fill the £4.4bn black hole left in the budget by the decision to cancel the PIP cuts.David Gauke, a Treasury minister, said the government would address this in the autumn statement.

* David Cameron has defended George Osborne in the Commons, saying that they run a "modern, compassionate, one-nation government" in his first public appearance after the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith. In his statement to MPs Cameron also went out of his way to praise Duncan Smith, in contrast to the tone he adopted when Duncan Smith resigned on Friday night. Cameron said:

[Duncan Smith] spent almost a decade campaigning for welfare reform and improving people's life chances and he has spent the last six years implementing those policies in government. And in that time we have seen nearly half a million fewer children living in workless households, over a million fewer people on out of work benefits, and nearly 2.4 million more people in work. And in spite of having to take difficult decisions on the deficit - child poverty, inequality, pensioner poverty are all down. My honourable friend contributed an enormous amount to the work of this government and he can be proud of what he achieved.

* Cameron has told MP that there is "no prospect" of the member states allowing Turkey to join the EU for many, many years. Asked about this by the Tory MP John Redwood, he said:

I think the issue here is it's not remotely on the cards for this to happen for many, many years to come. Every country has a veto at every stage, including this country. The French, for instance, have said they will hold a referendum on Turkish membership and 75% of the French public don't want Turkey to join.

* Peers have voted for an amendment to the immigration bill that would force the the government to admit 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees to the UK.

That's all from me.

Thanks for the comments.

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block-time published-time 7.01pm GMT

Rafael Behr, Anne Perkins, Simon Jenkins and Martin Kettle have given their verdicts on Cameron's statement for Comment is free. You can read them all here.

Related: How convincing was David Cameron's Commons statement? | Rafael Behr, Anne Perkins and Simon Jenkins

block-time published-time 6.52pm GMT

Peers vote to force government to admit 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children In the Lords the government has suffered a significant defeat; peers have voted for an amendment to force the government "as soon as possible, make arrangements to relocate 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children who are in European countries to the United Kingdom".

The amendment was tabled by Alf Dubs, a Labour peer, was rescued from Prague and brought to this country as an unaccompanied child refugee in 1939 by Sir Nicolas Winton, the man known as Britain's Oscar Schindler.

Peers voted for it by 306 votes to 204, a majority of 102. Dubs said the move would protect children from exploitation, people trafficking, and abuse.

Lord Dubs Photograph: Katie Collins/PA block-time published-time 6.40pm GMT

Labour claims Treasury briefing undermines Crabb's pledge on no further welfare cuts Crabb's statement is over. But Owen Smith is raising a point of order. He quotes the tweet from the Sun's political editor.

enltrTreasury swiftly clarifying Crabb declaration on welfare cuts. Doesn't at all mean no more cuts in this parliament, just none planned. Ah.

— Tom Newton Dunn (@tnewtondunn) March 21, 2016 John Bercow, the Speaker, says this is not a point of order. He says Crabb can respond if he wants to. But Crabb remains in his seat.

Yvette Cooper goes next. She says Crabb may have been put in "an impossible position" by the Treasury and that he may have unintentionally misled the House. George Osborne should come to the Commons to clarify this, she says.

Bercow says Osborne is winding up the debate himself. And Osborne will probably in for the opening too, he says. Osborne can intervene then if he wants.

block-time published-time 6.34pm GMT

Labour's Liam Byrne asks Crabb if he has been told by the chancellor his budget is set to rise by £4.4bn (the amount that would have been saved by the PIP cut, over four years).

Crabb says the budget for spending on disability is rising.

block-time published-time 6.33pm GMT

The Labour MP Karen Buck asks why Crabb put a post on his Facebook page recently saying people claiming employment and support allowance (ESA - a disability benefit) in the work-related activity group (Wrag) were "able to work" when that is not correct. asks

Crabb says: "Good spot - it has been corrected."

block-time published-time 6.30pm GMT

Labour's Helen Goodman asks Crabb if his comment about not seeking further savings from the welfare budget means he is ruling out changing the rates as which benefits are paid, or changing the eligibility criteria.

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Crabb says that would amount to a cut. And that is not something the government is looking at, he says.

block-time published-time 6.28pm GMT

Crabb is still responding to questions. Labour MPs have repeatedly pressed him to explain where the money would come from to replace the £4.4bn black hole (that's £4.4bn over four years) left by the PIP U-turn. Daniel Zeichner said that, after three hours of statements from David Gauke, David Cameron and Crabb, we still have not had an answer to that. Cat Smith made a similar point.

Crabb said George Osborne would be responding to the budget debate tomorrow. He said he had repeatedly said the government is not seeking further savings from the welfare budget.

block-time published-time 6.24pm GMT

Crabb rules out 'offsetting savings' to compensate for money lost from PIP U-turn Crabb is still responding to questions from MPs.

Asked to clarify whether he is categorically ruling out further welfare cuts, he replies:

[Labour] are trying to tease out a commitment from this side of the chamber that there will never, ever, ever be any other changes to welfare spending every again. Well, that would be absurd, wouldn't it? We know that there needs to carry on being reform. The commitment that I'm making today, based on conversations with the chancellor of the exchequer and the prime minister over the weekend, is that we are not going ahead with those proposed PIP cuts, we won't be seeking alternative offsetting savings and as a government we are not seeking further savings from the welfare budget.

Stephen Crabb Photograph: BBC block-time updated-timeUpdated at 7.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 6.13pm GMT

In his opening statement Stephen Crabb also defended the welfare cap (the self-imposed limit on overall government welfare spending). He told MPs:

It is right that we monitor welfare spending carefully. The principle of introducing a welfare cap is the right one given the huge increases in welfare spending we saw under previous Labour governments, up nearly 60%. And the reality is that if we don't control the public finances it is always the poorest in our society that pay the biggest price. So we do need that discipline.

He said the level of the welfare cap would be reviewed at the autumn statement.

block-time published-time 6.05pm GMT

This is from the Sun 's Tom Newton Dunn.

enltrTreasury swiftly clarifying Crabb declaration on welfare cuts. Doesn't at all mean no more cuts in this parliament, just none planned. Ah.

— Tom Newton Dunn (@tnewtondunn) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 6.00pm GMT

Here is the key quote from Stephen Crabb.

After discussing this issue over the weekend with the prime minister and the chancellor we have no further plans to make welfare savings beyond the very substantial savings legislated for by parliament two weeks ago.

block-time published-time 5.58pm GMT

Yvette Cooper, the Labour former work and pensions secretary, asks Crabb to clarify whether his statement about no further welfare cuts means that there will be no cuts to replace the £1.3bn annual saving missing because of the PIP U-turn.

Crabb says he has covered this in his statement.

block-time published-time 5.50pm GMT

Owen Smith, the shadow work and pensions secretary, is responding to Crabb.

He welcomes Crabb to his post and welcomes the announcement about no further welfare cuts.

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But he asks for clarification. Will the government reverse the £30 a week cut to disabled people claiming the employment and support allowance?

He challenges Crabb's claim that the amount of money spend on the disabled is going up. He says spending on DLA and PIP is going down. And overall the amount spent on disability benefits has fallen by 6%, he says.

He says Labour will publish more information about these figures.

And he reminds MPs of what Iain Duncan Smith said about the government not supporting some groups because they did not vote Tory.

enltr. @OwenSmith_MP "Never again can they claim to be a One Nation Government. Never again can the Tories claim we are all in it together."

— Labour DWP Team (@LabourDWP) March 21, 2016 It was a powerful performance from Smith. I will post some quotes from it later.

Owen Smith Photograph: BBC block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.37pm GMT

Crabb says government has no plans for further welfare cuts Turning to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), he says it was designed to be more flexible than its predecessor benefit, disability living allowance (DLA).

The government will not go ahead with the changes announced before the budget.

He goes on to say there will be no further welfare cuts this parliament.

* Crabb says government has no further plans for welfare cuts beyond those already announced.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.09pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.34pm GMT

Stephen Crabb's statement Stephen Crabb has just started his statement as the new work and pensions secretary.

He begins with a tribute to Iain Duncan Smith. He came into the job with a sense of vision and achieved "some remarkable things".

Crabb says he intends to take a One Nation approach as he builds on Duncan Smith's achievements.

He says there are 3m more disabled people in work than in 2010.

block-time published-time 5.30pm GMT

Cameron is still responding to questions.

A few minutes ago Labour's Jack Dromey asked for an assurance that there would be no further cuts to disability benefits in this parliament.

Cameron sidestepped the question. The government was increasing the overall amount spent on disability benefits, he said.

block-time published-time 5.26pm GMT

Cameron v Corbyn - Verdict from the Twitter commentariat This is what some political journalists and commentators are saying on Twitter about the Cameron/Corbyn exchanges. Corbyn is attracting a lot of criticism.

From the Times's Patrick Kidd

enltrThat was arguably Corbyn's worst yet given how good it could have been. What could Cooper, Eagle, Benn et al have done with this chance?

— Patrick Kidd (@patrick_kidd) March 21, 2016 From the Telegraph's Michael Deacon

enltrYesterday I wrote a sketch suggesting that Labour should make IDS their leader. At the time, it was meant as a joke

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— Michael Deacon (@MichaelPDeacon) March 21, 2016 enltrOsborne doesn't turn up for the Urgent Question. Corbyn doesn't turn up for the Statement

— Michael Deacon (@MichaelPDeacon) March 21, 2016 From the BBC ’s Norman Smith

enltrMethinks Team Cameron will be mightily relieved by supportive response from Tory MPs to PM's statement..so far.....

— norman smith (@BBCNormanS) March 21, 2016 From the FT’s Sebastian Payne

enltrIn this statement, Corbyn seems to have no awareness of what's going on politics right now. No structure to his statement, dreadful delivery

— Sebastian Payne (@SebastianEPayne) March 21, 2016 From the New Statesman’s George Eaton

enltrCorbyn repeats call for Osborne to resign. Some Labour MPs think unwise when there's no prospect of him going.

— George Eaton (@georgeeaton) March 21, 2016 From the Times’s Sam Coates

enltrJust listened again to Jeremy Corbyn . No mention of IDS. Christ.

— Sam Coates Times (@SamCoatesTimes) March 21, 2016 From the Sun ’s Stig Abell ’s

enltrStill, it is not as if IDS questioned the entire moral basis of the last 6 years of Conservative government. Why would Corbyn mention him?

— Stig Abell (@StigAbell) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 5.12pm GMT

Labour’s Dennis Skinner asks for an assurance that this will be Osborne’s last budget. He has eight already. Only cats have nine lives, he says.

No, Cameron replies.

block-time published-time 5.08pm GMT

Labour’s Paula Sheriff, who campaigned against the “tampon tax”, says she is glad the “vagina-added tax” has been consigned to history.

Cameron says he thinks that epithet will be remembered. And he says the memory of discussing sanitary products with 27 other EU leaders will stick with him for a long time too.

block-time published-time 5.00pm GMT

Liz Kendall, the Labour former leadership contender, says Cameron say he is a compassionate Conservative. So how does he feel when a former leader of his party says that is simply not true?

Cameron talks about the government’s record creating jobs. He is “sad” Iain Duncan Smith has resigned, but the work of being a compassionate government will continue, he says.

block-time published-time 4.56pm GMT

Cameron's opening statement - Snap verdict We’ve probably got another hour or more of this statement to go, but already it feels as David Cameron has managed turn the dial down on the Tory budget turmoil by two or three notches. For today, at least, he has passed the point of maximum danger. Tory MPs are out in force defending the government and Jeremy Corbyn failed to lay a glove.

Like David Gauke earlier, Cameron failed to say anything at all about how the government will fill the gaping hole left in the budget calculations by the PIP U-turn. But he did stage a retreat of sorts. After Iain Duncan Smith resigned on Friday night Cameron responded by issuing a particularly snide letter that suggested the former work and pensions secretary was being hypocritical and irrational. A wise adviser would have encouraged him to think twice before publishing something so inflammatory, but Cameron has a temper which he appears to have misplaced on Friday night and out the letter went. Over the weekend anti-IDS briefing continued. But this afternoon Cameron has sued for peace, with a passage in his statement heaping praise on Duncan Smith. It remains to be seen how much this will repairs relations in the Tory party (a bit but not much, I guess), but it is a start.

And Cameron was helped by Corbyn. It is easy to assume that, with a government in crisis, all the leader of the opposition has to do to flatten the prime minister is turn up with a pithy soundbite. It is never that easy, not least because the prime minister has the final say. But Corbyn’s attack was broadbrush and ineffective, and

he did not challenge Cameron about the specifics of the charges levelled by his former colleague. We're now in the extraordinary position where the government has been condemned as too rightwing by Iain Duncan Smith. A better parliamentarian would have made some headway with that.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 5.03pm GMT

block-time published-time 4.38pm GMT

Cameron is responding to Corbyn.

He says he does not agree that Turkey is unsafe for Syrian refugees. That is insulting to Turkey, he says. They are hosting 2.6m refugees.

He says it may sound humane offering to take more Syrian refugees. But the government should not be encouraging more to come to Europe, he says. That would lead to more losing their lives crossing the Mediterranean.

He says refugees in France should seek asylum there.

He says he should have paid tribute to Paula Sherriff himself for her hard work.

On Osborne, he says Osborne will be in the Commons tomorrow to answer the debate.

And, on black holes, we should hear from the "time lords opposite', he says. They left the biggest budget black hole ever, he says.

* Cameron says Labour cannot comment on budget "black holes" because they left the biggest black hole ever.

block-time published-time 4.34pm GMT

Jeremy Corbyn is responding to Cameron.

He says Cameron only gave him advance sight of half his statement (not the whole statement, as is customary.)

He expresses concern about the EU plan to force migrants to return to Turkey. He says Amnesty International has said Turkey is not a safe country for refugees.

He says Britain should take more than the 20,000 refugees from Syria already pledged. Britain should cooperate with the Europe-wide response, he says.

He pays tribute to Paua Sherriff, the Labour MP, for the way she has campaigned against the tampon tax.

Where is George Osborne , Corbyn asks.

Instead of covering up for Osborne, Cameron should get him to come to the Commons and explain why his budget has fallen apart. He says this is the first time he has seen a budget fall apart like this.

He says the government has not ruled out alternative disability cuts.

He says the budget is still unfair.

Osborne should explain how he can fill the black hole in his budget. If not, he should consider his position.

Jeremy Corbyn Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 4.28pm GMT

Cameron heaps praise on Duncan Smith and Osborne Cameron turns to other matters at the summit.

He used it to deal with a long-standing dispute about VAT matters (ie, the tampon tax), he says.

Plans announced in the next few days will allow countries to extend the zero-rate to certain products, including sanitary products. On that basis the government will impose a zero-rate on sanitary products.

Cameron turns to Iain Duncan Smith and says he contributed "an enormous amount" to the work of this government and can be proud of what he did.

The government will continue to prioritise improving life chances, he says.

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It will take more people out of tax. It will rebuild sink estates, improve life chances, and reform prisons, he says.

And next mont the national living wage will come into force, he says.

None of this would be possible without George Osborne , he says. Without sound public finances, you have to cut spending and put up taxes. You don't get more life chances that way; you get fewer.

We must no burden our children and grandchildren with debts we do not have the courage to pay off, he says.

He ends by saying he leads a "modern, compassionate, One Nation Conservative government".

* Cameron pays lavish tribute to Iain Duncan Smith and George Osborne .

* Cameron says he leads a "modern, compassionate, One Nation Conservative government".

block-time published-time 4.21pm GMT

David Cameron 's Commons statement David Cameron is making his statement now. It is focused on the EU summit, which was about how to deal with the migration crisis.

He says the UK is not in the Schengen agreement, so migrants who enter other EU countries cannot come to this country. But it is still in Britain's interests to help the EU deal with this crisis, he says.

For the first time the EU came up with a comprehensive plan.

It will be the best chance to make a difference, he says, because it will break the business model used by people smugglers.

He says Britain will pay for its contribution to the EU money going to Turkey from its aid budget.

And he says the plan to give Turks visa-free travel within the EU will not mean Turks coming to Britain.

David Cameron Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 4.15pm GMT

Labour's Stephen Doughty asks why Osborne is not here. And how will the £4.4bn be filled?

Gauke says Osborne has worked tirelessly to make life better for people. And he says Labour never says how they would save money.

block-time published-time 4.14pm GMT

This is from the Sun 's Tom Newton Dunn.

enltrI'm told the PM will be at his "most magnanimous" in statement to MPs. No knifing from Boris today either. Bleeding over, at least for now.

— Tom Newton Dunn (@tnewtondunn) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 4.13pm GMT

My colleague Heather Stewart thinks the Tory whips have done a good job.

enltrGovt have done a good job planting supportive questions, allowing @DavidGauke to wax lyrical about Osborne's greatest hits.

— Heather Stewart (@GuardianHeather) March 21, 2016 And Huffington Post's Paul Waugh thinks Gauke deserves credit too.

enltr1 reason Cameron shd give Gauke a promotion: he's done a brilliant job at uniting Tory benches, neat seatwarmer for Dave's own healing task

— Paul Waugh (@paulwaugh) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 4.11pm GMT

This is from Sky's Emily Ashton.

enltrCameron has just entered the chamber, nodding & smiling at Bercow. Sure he's privately fuming at his statement being delayed.

— Emily Ashton (@elashton) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 4.10pm GMT

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Labour’s Mary Creagh asks Gauke if he agrees with Iain Duncan Smith that cutting PIP, in the context of a budget that cut taxes for the rich, was indefensible.

Gauke does not answer directly. But he says the highest-earning 20% now pay half of all taxes. That would not have happened under Labour, he says.

block-time published-time 4.08pm GMT

Gauke tells a Labour MP that, if he is worried about black holes in the budget, he ought to speak to his own front bench about the black holes in Labour’s plans.

block-time published-time 4.07pm GMT

William Wragg, a Conservative, says his government’s willingness to back down over PIP is preferable to Gordon Brown ’s refusal to retreat over abolishing the 10p rate of income tax.

block-time published-time 4.05pm GMT

Gauke says, although Labour complain about the capital gains tax cut, the rate is still higher than it was under Labour in 2010.

block-time published-time 4.05pm GMT

But if Gauke is refusing to answer the questions, at least he is being “robust” when it comes to sticking to the government line, my colleague Heather Stewart says.

enltrPlenty of supportive qu's from Tory backbenchers for @DavidGauke , who's doing a robust job, with much use of the "long-term economic plan".

— Heather Stewart (@GuardianHeather) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 4.02pm GMT

Labour’s Chuka Umunna says this government has borrowed more in five years than Labour did in 13 years. He says if the government can scrap the PIP cut, why can’t it also cut the bedroom tax?

Gauke says Umunna seems to be one of those Labour figures who thinks you can cut borrowing by borrowing more. He says getting rid of the spare room subsidy helps cut the deficit.

block-time published-time 4.00pm GMT

ITV ’s Robert Peston isn’t impressed by David Gauke’s performance.

enltr. @DavidGauke has been instructed not to depart from "it's all going swimmingly" script. No substantive answer to @johnmcdonnellMP questions

— Robert Peston (@Peston) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 3.57pm GMT

Labour’s Ian Lucas says Osborne said this was a budget for the next generation. Which member of the next generation will succeed Osborne?

Gauke wonders if that is the best Lucas can do.

block-time published-time 3.56pm GMT

Labour’s Stephen Timms asks Gauke to respond to Iain Duncan Smith’s claim that George Osborne did not want to spend money on the disabled because they did not vote Conservative.

Gauke says spending on the disabled has actually gone up.

block-time published-time 3.55pm GMT

And Paddy Ashdown is gloating with this tweet, referring to Osborne’s joke about the Lib Dems in his budget speech.

enltrOh the irony! Osborne claims he abolished Lib Dems. But I bet he misses us now! Never in political history has such a biter been so bit!

— Paddy Ashdown (@paddyashdown) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 3.54pm GMT

This is from the BBC ’s Ross Hawkins.

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enltrNot seen Labour backbenchers in such noisy good heart for ages.

— Ross Hawkins (@rosschawkins) March 21, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.55pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.54pm GMT

Labour's Rachel Reeves says this budget makes the 2012 "omnishambles' one look like a model of good policy-making. Do the figures in the budget red book, including the £4.4n in the Personal Independence Payments, still stand.

Gauke says what still stands is the plan to get the budget in surplus.

block-time published-time 3.51pm GMT

Chris Philp, a Conservative, asks Gauke to confirm that spending on disability has gone up £2bn over the last five years, and that it will go up by £1bn in this parliament.

Gauke says disability spending went up by more than £2bn in the last parliament.

And this is from the Spectator's Isabel Hardman.

enltrWhat a parallel universe we are in now where planted question from Tory backbencher is praising govt on spending going up.

— Isabel Hardman (@IsabelHardman) March 21, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.49pm GMT

Philip Davies, a Conservative, says the Treasury would find it easier if it ended the ring-fencing of the international aid budget.

Gauke says he does not agree. That was a manifesto commitment, he says.

block-time published-time 3.48pm GMT

This is from Labour's Mary Creagh.

enltrJust a dozen or so Tories in the chamber to support Gauke and his statement on disability and plenty of gaps on the benches.

— Mary Creagh (@MaryCreaghMP) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 3.47pm GMT

Chris Leslie, the Labour former shadow chancellor, asks how MPs can vote on the budget tomorrow if the scorecard in the budget red book (explaining how the Treasury will fund its plans) has been ripped up. On a scale of one to 10, how embarrassed is Gauke.

Gauke says he would be embarrassed if, like Leslie, he thought there was going to be a vote on the Personal Independence Payment tomorrow. There won't be, he says.

block-time published-time 3.45pm GMT

Yvette Cooper, the Labour former work and pensions secretary, asks if the Treasury will produce a new scorecard explaining where the missing £4.4bn will come from? Will it come from the DWP? And she says George Osborne is not fit to be chancellor if he cannot come to the Commons to defend his budget.

Gauke says the government will set out its plans in the autumn statement.

block-time published-time 3.40pm GMT

Gauke is responding to McDonnell.

He says there is no question of the government taking disability benefits down to the level they were in 2010.

Spending on disability benefits is £3bn higher now than it was then in real terms, he says.

He says the top 1% are paying a greater proportion of the total income tax take than in any year under Labour.

David Gauke Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 3.36pm GMT

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McDonnell says the budget process is “in absolute chaos” McDonnell says the budget process is “in absolute chaos”.

He says it is unprecedented for the government to have dropped a major budget measure, and to have accepted two opposition amendments before the end of the third day of the budget debate.

He says the cuts to capital gains tax and tax cuts for the top 5% are indefensible in a budget cutting benefits for the disabled.

He challenges Gauke to rule out any further disability cuts for the rest of this parliament.

Which other groups might be targeted?

He says the Personal Independence Payment change leaves a £4.4bn black hole in the budget, besides the other unspecified departmental cuts, and the loss of revenue caused by the abolition of the “tampon tax.

He says the government should rip up the budget and start again.

John McDonnell Photograph: BBC block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.41pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.33pm GMT

David Gauke says there will be statements from David Cameron and Stephen Crabb later. And George Osborne will respond to the budget debate tomorrow. So MPs have three chances to discuss this before they vote, he says.

But he says he is grateful for the chance to talk about how the government is taking people out of income tax and improving the economy.

block-time published-time 3.31pm GMT

McDonnell asks if the chancellor will make a statement on changes to the budget.

“Where is he?” some MPs shout.

block-time published-time 3.30pm GMT

John McDonnell's urgent question to Treasury on budget U-turn John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, is about to ask his urgent question about the budget U-turn.

David Gauke, the Treasury minister, will reply.

block-time published-time 3.25pm GMT

Cable says Tories never expected to have to impose £12bn welfare cuts because they expected a second coalition Vince Cable, the former Lib Dem business secretary, was interviewed on the World at One about the budget. He was asked if he thought that George Osborne committed the government to cutting £12bn from welfare before the election because he had the prospect of a coalition “at the back of his mind” and thought that he would be able to abandon these cuts as a coalition compromise. Cable replied:

I don’t think it was at the back of his mind. It was at the front of his mind. I think both David Cameron and he assumed that there would be another hung parliament, that the Liberal Democrats would again be in government, that we would be a moderating influence and they would be able to step back from commitments like that that they did not really believe they could deliver.

block-time published-time 3.13pm GMT

Paula Sheriff, the Labour MP who tabled the amendment to the budget resolution calling for the “tampon tax” to be abolished, has welcomed the news from Number 10 that the government will not oppose it. She said:

After nearly two years of campaigning, the announcement that the tampon tax will finally be scrapped is a huge victory for common sense, and all the women who have fought on this issue for so long.

We now need final clarity on how and when the tax will be dropped. I will be preparing amendments to the finance bill following the budget and I hope this will pass through the Commons before the EU referendum in June. The chancellor also needs to guarantee secure, long-term funding for the vital women’s charities and services that were receiving the money raised by VAT on sanitary products.

The test now will be for producers and retailers to pass the savings on to consumers, and to work with the government to make sure the charities which had a funding boost from the tampon tax don’t lose out. I am

writing to manufacturers and retailers today to ask them to meet with me very soon to reach an agreement on that.

Paula Sherriff Photograph: Christopher Thomond for the Guardian block-time published-time 3.06pm GMT

Stephen Crabb, the new work and pensions secretary, will be in the Commons later. As Patrick Butler and Anushka Asthana report, he has come under fire over his support for another disability cut that will leave sick and disabled claimants £30 a week worse off.

Related: Stephen Crabb under pressure over support for cut in disability aid

Stephen Crabb Photograph: Niklas Halle'N/AFP/Getty Images block-time published-time 3.03pm GMT

This, from the Conservative MP Michael Fabricant, contains an important truth.

enltrGeorge #Osborne has allies in the House of Commons.

David #Cameron has friends.

And it's friends you need when there's trouble.

— Michael Fabricant (@Mike_Fabricant) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 3.01pm GMT

McDonnell accuses Osborne of 'insulting' parliament by not responding to urgent question John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, has put out a statement about George Osborne ’s decision not to respond to his Commons urgent question. He said:

It’s unacceptable to the country and insulting to parliament that the chancellor is not turning up to respond to my urgent question on the chaos of his making around a Budget he delivered only last week which had collapsed by Friday night.

This has meant hundreds of thousands of disabled people will have been worried needlessly by George Osborne .

And today yet another thread of George Osborne ’s budget has unravelled. The chancellor and David Cameron knew that if they hadn’t climbed-down on the Tampon Tax and Solar Jobs Tax they were heading for defeat and would have lost the first votes on a budget debate since 1994.

George Osborne needs to now set out how he will fill the back hole in his budget. His failure to do so means his fantasy £10bn surplus target, like his credibility, is further shot to pieces.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.27pm GMT

block-time published-time 2.44pm GMT

This is from the BBC ’s James Landale.

enltrTory MPs tell me David Cameron has unexpectedly decided to address the backbench 1922 committee on Wednesday

— James Landale (@BBCJLandale) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 2.27pm GMT

Lunchtime summary

* David Cameron is preparing for a Commons statement which he will try to use to repair some of the damage caused to his government by Iain Duncan Smith’s resignation and by the budget U-turn over disability cuts. His statement will be mostly focused on last week’s EU summit, but he will face questions from MPs for more than an hour and Number 10 has indicated that he will use it to insist that he remains committed to One Nation Conservatism. Duncan Smith suggested in his resignation statement and his interview with Andrew Marr yesterday that the government was now only acting in the interests of its own supporters, particularly the wealthy and pensioners.

* George Osborne has ducked a challenge to come to the Commons to defend his budget. Labour’s John McDonnell has tabled an urgent question, but Osborne has chosen not to respond to it, sending his Treasury colleague David Gauke to the despatch box to deal with the questions instead. The UQ will start at 3.30pm, and Cameron’s statement will start soon after 4pm, and I will be covering both in detail.

* The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that poorer working-age households, especially those with children, will be “hit hard” by the government’s tax and benefits changes while pensioners will be protected, a

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respected economic think-tank has found. In an analysis of the tax and benefit changes coming into effect in this parliament it says:

Again, pensioners are protected while poorer working age households are hit hard, especially those with children. This is the result of the continued protection of pensioner benefits (including maintaining the 'triple lock' on the basic state pension) while making further deep cuts to working-age benefit spending.

Again, households in the upper half of the income distribution (but below the very top) are likely to see little direct impact of tax and benefit changes on their incomes on average, as some benefits cuts and small tax rises are offset by further increases in the income tax personal allowance, and the raising of the higher rate threshold.

So the income distribution has narrowed, but tax and benefit changes planned for this parliament will likely help take it back to something like pre-recession levels.

* Tory MPs have continued to attack the budget, with David Davis saying it was unfair and contrary to Cameron's One Nation rhetoric. (See 10.59am.) Sarah Wollaston said the government should abandon its policy of protecting benefits for richer pensioners in the interests of intergenerational fairness. (See 10.17am.) Sarah Wollaston said the government should abandon its policy of protecting benefits for richer pensioners in the interests of intergenerational fairness. (See

* Number 10 has indicated that the government will not explain where it will find the money to replace the money lost by they £4bn Personal Independence Payment U-turn until the autumn statement. (See 12.48pm.) Stephen Crabb, the new work and pensions secretary, will say more on this when he makes his own Commons statement, some time after 5.30pm.

* Downing Street has said the government will not oppose two Labour amendments, abolishing the tampon tax and blocking a rise in VAT on solar panels, when MPs vote on the budget tomorrow. The European Commission will publish plans this week to give EU states more flexibility over varying VAT, and Number 10 says these new EU rules will enable the government to abolish the tampon tax and cancel the planned VAT rise for solar panels.

* A Conservative MP has revealed that she and colleagues warned Osborne the day before the budget about the changes to PIP. Karen Lumley MP released the letter, which said the budget plans risked looking like a "sustained attack on disabled benefits by the government" and would cause long-term damage to its reputation. The letter demonstrates that Osborne was aware of i backbenchers' concerns about the impending cuts but pressed ahead anyway. It said:

We are writing to you as a small group of colleagues to raise concern about the proposed changes in personal independence payment criteria. Many colleagues will have been surprised by the response to the recent ESA [employment and support allowance] WRAG [work-related activity group] benefit, which has led resulted in large amounts of personal abuse towards colleagues.

Coming so soon after the ESA changes, we are concerned that further changes to PIP will be seen as a sustained attack on disabled benefits by the government. This is very concerning for the impact it will have on disabled people, but it also feeds into a wider narrative that the Conservatives are trying to balance the books on the backs of the most vulnerable.

* Chuka Umunna, the former shadow business secretary, has said Britain is on a "slippery slope" towards electing a prime minister in the mould of Donald Trump. In a speech in London to launch a new All Party Group on Social Integration, he said:

Some say it wouldn't fly in modern Britain. That people here could never stomach a Prime Minister in the mould of Donald Trump.

A major party leader who would slander and stigmatise a whole faith group and advocate building a wall to keep immigrants out of our country. Who would say anything to get elected and bully and shout down anyone who spoke up against them. But we are already on that slippery slope.

If we continue down this path, we could face nothing less than the Trumpification of British democracy.

In the run up to the general election, as I travelled around the country, I was confronted time and time again with the reality that here - just like in the States - people are losing faith in the idea that politics can make a difference to their lives.

block-time published-time 2.05pm GMT

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John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, is appealing to George Osborne to “do the honourable thing” and reply to Labour’s urgent question about the budget in person.

enltrLooks like Gauke standing in for my UQ. I appeal again to @George_Osborne to do the honourable thing & personally come to defend his budget.

— John McDonnell MP (@johnmcdonnellMP) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 1.48pm GMT

IFS says post-2015 policies will increase income inequality The Institute for Fiscal Studies has published a briefing today looking at whether government policies really are spreading the burden between income groups fairly. has published

It says that income inequality is lower now than it was before the recession, but that over the next five much of this will be undone because the rich will benefit more from government policy than the poor.

This chart illustrates this.

Change in household income, by percentile point Photograph: IFS Look at the green line first. It shows that between 2007 and 2015 the poorest households (those on the far left) saw their income rise by almost 10%, while the richest households (those on the far right) saw their income fall by around 4%.

But the pale dotted line shows what is expected to happen between 2015 and 2020. This time the line is slanted the other way, with the richest (those on the right) doing best.

As the IFS says, overall from 2007 to 2020 the line is reasonably flat, suggesting that over the decade the rich and the poor will have been treated broadly equally.

This is from the IFS commentary. (I’ve inserted the bold type.)

Chart 1 illustrates the pattern of overall changes in living standards. The solid line shows that there has been a considerable equalisation of the income distribution in the years since the recession, with incomes rising for those towards the bottom of the distribution and falling for those towards the top. This reflects a combination of rising employment, falling earnings and some increases in benefit income (between 2007–08 and 2009–10). On some measures, inequality is now at a 25 year low.

The lighter dotted line shows our projections of what will happen to incomes over the next five years. This line slopes in the other direction. The lack of real income growth at the bottom reflects further benefit cuts, while the better performance further up is dependent on real earnings rising as expected by the OBR. Finally the darker dotted line shows our projections for the period as a whole (which also of course depends on earnings rising as projected from now). It suggests that we should expect much of the recent fall in inequality to be undone over the next five years, resulting in a similar change in incomes for rich and poor over the whole period since the recession. Some evidence, perhaps, that we are all in it together.

Another chart just looks at the impact of tax and benefit decisions taken since the general election. These clearly benefit wealthy households more than poor households. Thoes doing worst are the working-age households with children (the grey line) in the second poorest decile.

Impact of tax and benefit reforms from May 2015 to April 2019, by income and household type Photograph: IFS block-time published-time 1.16pm GMT

The Treasury say George Osborne will be winding up the budget debate tomorrow night, ie speaking just before MPs vote. Apparently it will be the first time the chancellor has done this since the 1990s, and it helps to explain why he will not be responding to Labour’s urgent question today.

block-time published-time 1.11pm GMT

Osborne ducks Labour UQ on the budget, with Gauke replying instead George Osborne has ducked Labour’s UQ on the budget; David Gauke, the Treasury minister, will be responding instead, the BBC reports.

enltrLucky David Gauke will respond for govt this afternoon

— Laura Kuenssberg (@bbclaurak) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 1.01pm GMT

Cameron's Commons statement going ahead, No 10 says Number 10 is saying Cameron’s statement is going ahead. It seems Chris Bryant may have been misled.

enltrThe PM oral statement on EU is going ahead, according to Downing street, straight after urgent question

— Anushka Asthana (@GuardianAnushka) March 21, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.03pm GMT

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block-time published-time 12.55pm GMT

The Spectator’s Isabel Hardman says we may get David Gauke, the Treasury minister, replying to the UQ.

enltrJohn McDonnell granted urgent question to Osborne about Budget. Presume David Gauke already writing out the answer he'll be sent to give.

— Isabel Hardman (@IsabelHardman) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 12.52pm GMT

The Treasury have not said who will respond to Jeremy Corbyn ’s UQ, but my colleague Anushka Asthana says it may well not be George Osborne himself.

enltrGeorge Osborne is going to wind up the Budget debate tomorrow... Not sure he'll come to parly for UQ today, but maybe there for PM statement

— Anushka Asthana (@GuardianAnushka) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 12.50pm GMT

Cameron 'cancels Commons statement', Labour says Chris Bryant, the shadow leader of the Commons, says he has been told that Cameron has pulled his Commons statement.

enltrCommittee clerk just notified me PM no longer making statement on EU summit. Surely this can't be true?

— Chris Bryant MP (@RhonddaBryant) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 12.48pm GMT

N0 10 lobby briefing - Summary Here are the main points from the Number 10 lobby briefing.

* Downing Street indicated that the government will not explain where it will find the money to replace the money lost by they £4bn Personal Independence Payment U-turn until the autumn statement. The prime minister’s spokeswoman said:

There will be an opporunity for further forecasts at the autumn statement and decisions will be made in the light of that.

* She confirmed that the government would not go ahead with the changes to the Personal Independent Payment “in their current form”. But she would not comment on whether the cuts could be brought back in a different form, or whether the savings would be made elsewhere. The spokeswoman said she was “not going to get into speculation”.

* She suggested that Cameron deserved credit for being willing to drop the plan to cut PIP. She said:

There have been a lot of concerns raised about that policy. The prime minister is a man who is prepared to listen to concerns.

* She said the government was still committed to the welfare cap (a rule that is supposed to limit overall government spending on benefits). She said this was designed to increase transparency in relation to the welfare budget and that “we believe it is right to have this measure in place”. She went on:

The public want us to control the welfare budget.

* She said the government will not oppose a Labour amendment to block a rise in VAT on solar panels when MPs vote on the budget tomorrow night.

* She said the government will also not oppose the amendment from Labour MP Paula Sheriff opposing the “tampon tax” when MPs vote on the budget .

* The spokeswoman said Cameron did not accept the suggestion from Iain Duncan Smith that the government was ignoring the interests of the poor because they did not vote Conservative. She also said that Cameron did not accept the claim from Duncan Smith, supported by the Tory MP Sarah Wollaston on the Today programme, that the government’s policies were biased in favour of pensioners. She said the government was acting in the interests of “a whole range of people” and cited apprenticeships and the national living wage as examples of what it was doing for working-age people.

* Downing Street is still committed to the “triple lock” that protects pensions, the spokeswoman said. Some people have cited this as an example of a policy that should be abandoned so as to release more money to protect the disabled.

* She said Cameron was leading “a One Nation government that is focused on improving opportunities for all”.

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* She said that the pensions minister Ros Altmann was speaking “in a personal capacity” at the weekend when she criticised Duncan Smith’s treatment of her at the Department for Work and Pensions. No 10 did not know in advance that Altmann was going to speak out, the spokeswoman said. She implied that Number 10 was not happy about Altmann’s intervention, but she said the prime minister still had confidence in her.

* The spokeswoman brushed aside claims from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Resolution Foundation that the budget was regressive by saying that top earners are paying a higher proportion of income tax. The share of total income tax paid by the top 1% is 28%, which is higher than ever, she said.

* The spokeswoman said Cameron still had confidence in Osborne. Asked if Cameron has complete confidence in the chancellor, she replied: “Absolutely”. But, when asked if he thought Osborne was “playing a blinder”, she was more equivocal.

The prime minister recognises that as a government, both in the last parliament and in this parliament, we face challenging global economic circumstances.

10 Downing Street Photograph: Leon Neal/AFP/Getty Images block-time published-time 12.42pm GMT

It will be up to the Treasury to decide whether George Osborne responds to Corbyn’s UQ, or whether another minister takes his place. I’ll post as soon as I find out who they are putting up.

block-time published-time 12.38pm GMT

McDonnell granted UQ to summon Osborne to Commons to explain PIP U-turn John McDonnell has been granted an urgent question designed to drag George Osborne to the Commons to comment on the Personal Independence Payment U-turn.

enltrUQ granted at 3.30 to @johnmcdonnellMP to ask @George_Osborne to make a statement on changes to the Budget.

— Labour Whips (@labourwhips) March 21, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.05pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.56am GMT

Government to accept Labour budget amendment opposing VAT increase on solar panels I’m just back from the Number 10 lobby briefing. I will post a full summary soon, but here are the main points.

* Downing Street indicated that the government will not explain where it will find the money to replace the money lost by they £4bn Personal Independence Payment U-turn until the autumn statement.

* The government will not oppose a Labour amendment to block a rise in VAT on solar panels when MPs vote on the budget tomorrow night, the prime minister’s spokeswoman said.

* The government will also not oppose the amendment from Labour MP Paula Sheriff opposing the “tampon tax” when MPs vote on the budget.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.59am GMT

block-time published-time 10.59am GMT

David Davis says government not living up to its One Nation rhetoric Here are the key points from David Davis’s interview with the Victoria Derbyshire on the BBC .

* Davis said that Iain Duncan Smith was right to describe the budget as unfair. He said that Duncan Smith was a man of integrity who knew what he was talking about. Asked if that meant he agreed with Duncan Smith about the budget being unfair, he replied: “That’s what it looks like.”

* Davis said the government was not living up to its One Nation rhetoric.

What [voters]] want to see is that parties live by their own words. We have used the phrase ‘We’re all in this together’ many times. And it is quite important that we live by that. So I am very sympathetic to Iain Duncan Smith’s position because this is what he stands for.

* He said that the government should not try to compensate for the money lost by not cutting Personal Independence Payment by other cuts in the welfare budget. The money should come from other government departments, he suggested.

I think it would be, to be honest. I think they have to go back and think again.

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In the comments BTL benmandel asked whether the PIP cut raises £1.3bn or £4.4bn. It would save £1.3bn a year by 2019-20 but journalists have arrived at the £4.4bn figure by doing cumulative savings over this parliament.

* He said Osborne had no chance of replacing David Cameron as party leader in the near future. Asked if Osborne's chances of becoming prime minister were finished, he replied:

Not ever. If the leadership election were to be in the next six months, I think he would be sunk without trace.

He also said it might make sense to move Osborne to another post.

Very, very few people go straight from being chancellor to being prime minister, and when they do, it's not always a success. Gordon Brown was the last one.

He said that James Callaghan did other jobs after leaving the Treasury (home secretary and foreign secretary) and that he was "given the circumstances, a very successful prime minister".

I'm off to the lobby briefing now. I will post again after 11.30am.

David Davis Photograph: BBC block-time published-time 10.40am GMT

This is from Channel 4 News's Tim Bouverie.

enltrSenior Tory MP: IDS was always viewed as a "bear of very little brain" by Cameron and Osborne. Still, PIP was a "massive cock up"

— Tim Bouverie (@TimPBouverie) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 10.39am GMT

These are from the BBC 's Norman Smith.

enltr"Power is ebbing away from Osborne and Cameron" former minister tells me

— norman smith (@BBCNormanS) March 21, 2016 enltr"George Osborne was never viable leadership material. Now he's holed beneath the water line" says former Tory minister

— norman smith (@BBCNormanS) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 10.36am GMT

Sky's Faisal Islam has an interesting take on the way George Osborne 's budget has backfired.

enltrQuite remarkable how the Chancellor has been systematically caught in the series of self-imposed traps set ostensibly for Ed Balls...

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 enltr... 1. Surplus target led to the eyebrow-raising fiscal rollercoaster pre-election. spread out by more even cuts in July. Now reintroduced..

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 enltr2. Welfare Cap - was reset in July downwards, limiting Labour room for manoeuvre - but forcing Chancellor to breach with tax credit uturn

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 enltr3. Welfare Cap meant savings could only be found from tax credits, housing benefit or disability benefits even as pensions hiked by 2.9%

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 enltr4. With tax credits ruled out post-u-turn, the only Welfare Cap compliant cuts were to disability benefits...thats what IDS confirmed to me

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 enltr5. So now there has been a reversal on disability benefit cuts too, that only leaves housing benefit "in scope" - or the Welfare Cap is dead

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) March 21, 2016 block-time published-time 10.31am GMT

David Davis says budget was unfair David Davis, the Conservative backbencher, has just told the BBC 's Victoria Derbyshire programme that he agrees with Iain Duncan Smith about the budget being unfair.

I'll post more from his interview shortly.

block-time published-time 10.28am GMT

The Economist Intelligence Unit has sent out a briefing saying that it thinks Iain Duncan Smith has "greatly—perhaps terminally—reduced [George] Osborne's chance of becoming Conservative leader when [David] Cameron steps down" and that this will help Theresa May.

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One potential beneficiary will be the home secretary, Theresa May; we believe she is now strongest placed to succeed Mr Cameron.

block-time published-time 10.17am GMT

Tory MP suggests Cameron should abandon pledge to protect benefits for wealthy pensioners Sarah Wollaston, the Conservative backbencher, used her interview with the Today programme this morning to suggest that David Cameron should abandon the party's promise not to cut benefits for wealthy pensioners (like the winter fuel payment). In his resignation letter Duncan Smith suggested this promise was a mistake. Wollaston told Today:

The point that Iain Duncan Smith was making was that there are some groups at the moment that can't be touched. If we are going to have inter-generational fairness, that might mean looking at where that might fall... I don't think there will be as much resistance to that as people might imagine, because inter-generational fairness matters to older people as well, and to wealthier older pensioners.

She also said that, if Cameron wanted people to believe he was committed to social justice, he had to show that through his policies.

Today, when David Cameron stands up, he has to reaffirm the message that led many people like myself to join the Conservative party in the first place when he became leader.

Are we about social justice? Are we about spreading the burden fairly? We need to hear that very clear message today.

People judge us on our actions, not just on our words, and if, in the same Budget, we are trying to link a reduction in personal independence payments at the same time we are cutting taxes for the wealthiest, I'm afraid that isn't consistent. We need that message to be consistent.

block-time published-time 9.56am GMT

Howard defends Osborne and urges Tories to 'calm down' Michael Howard (now Lord Howard), who was Conservative leader after Iain Duncan Smith and before David Cameron , was on the Today programme in the 8.10 slot this morning. Howard was a big patron of George Osborne (at one point he appeared to favour him as his successor to Cameron) and he used the interview to defend Osborne strongly. He also said the party should "calm down".

I would be telling my colleagues if I was still in the House of Commons to calm down, to remember that it's less than a year since the Conservative party won a general election under David Cameron 's leadership, that one of the main elements in that election victory - probably the main element - was our economic recovery during the five years leading up to that election, for which George Osborne as chancellor of the exchequer deserves an enormous amount of credit...

We are going to be this year the fastest-growing economy of all the advanced economies in the Western world. That is not an accident. That is something that owes a great deal to the stewardship of the chancellor of the exchequer, and that's the kind of thing that's going to determine George Osborne 's record.

Howard also said that if one element of the budget had to be changed (the proposed Personal Independence Payment cut, which has now been abandoned), that was not "the end of the world".

We're having a budget in which one element is being thought about again. I don't think that's the end of the world. I don't think it's something about which people should necessarily be greatly concerned. I think it shows that we have a government which is prepared to listen and think again, and I think that's to its credit.

Howard also said he had "high regard" for Iain Duncan Smith and that Duncan Smith "deserves great credit for the welfare reform". Greg Clark, the communities minister, was on the programme about half an hour saying much the same thing. (Clark said Duncan Smith and Cameron and Osborne "have worked very successfully together over the years, for example, to get more people into work than ever before, to have fewer children in workless households".) The Sunday Times ' s Tim Shipman thinks this is a belated attempt by Number 10 to repair the damage caused by Cameron's decision to respond to Duncan Smith's resignation on Friday night with a snide letter implying that Duncan Smith was being irrational. ' s Tim Shipman thinks this is a belated attempt by Number 10 to repair the damage caused by Cameron's decision to respond to Duncan Smith's resignation on Friday night with

enltrBoth Michael Howard and Greg Clark sent out to be nice to IDS. No 10 always do this after they've gone ballistic and first made things worse

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— Tim Shipman (@ShippersUnbound) March 21, 2016 Michael Howard Photograph: Stefan Rousseau/PA block-time published-time 9.26am GMT

Pound falls following Iain Duncan Smith's resignation The pound has fallen this morning, my colleague Graeme Wearden reports on the business live blog.

Sterling has been falling this morning, after work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith sensationally resigned late on Friday .

The pound fell by almost one cent against the US dollar, hitting a low of $1.4377. It is also down 0.4% against the euro, at €1.2803.

Although the moves aren't huge, the City is taking note of Duncan Smith's shock decision to quit, and his attack on the 'deeply unfair' budget announced last week.

It has exposed serious splits at the heart of the government, with some MPs supporting his criticism.

IDS has denied that his resignation is motivated by June's referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union . But he is one of the most senior Brexit supporters, so his move to the back benches could intensity the battle over the EU .

There is more on this on the business live blog.

Related: Chinese stock market hits two-month high; pound falls after IDS quits - business live

block-time published-time 9.16am GMT

No 10 claims Cameron does not blame Osborne The Times has got the most striking headline: "Cameron: I blame Osborne." (See 9.05am.)

The story (paywall) is based on what David Cameron reportedly told a cabinet colleague. Here's an excerpt.

In a rare sign of division between the two men, the prime minister said that his chancellor was responsible for the dispute that ended in the resignation of Iain Duncan Smith as work and pensions secretary.

Mr Cameron privately claimed that Mr Osborne would pay with his reputation for the failure to handle the issue. "Cameron said in no uncertain terms that Osborne had messed up, it was all his fault and would have hell to pay in the papers," a cabinet source said.

A senior member of staff at No 10 disputed the claim, however, insisting that it did not represent Mr Cameron's view. "The prime minister does not believe the chancellor was responsible for what happened," the source said. "They are working as closely as they ever have done."

This morning a Number 10 spokesman said that the Times story was "not true" and "total nonsense".

It may well be the case, as the Number 10 rebuttal suggests, that Cameron has no desire at all to undermine Osborne. However it would be odd if Cameron did not think that Osborne has "messed up" the budget, because it is self-evident that he has. And it was obvious to everyone at the weekend that Osborne was going to have "hell to pay in the papers". So the key Times quote is 100% plausible.

block-time published-time 9.05am GMT

Tory turmoil - What the papers are saying I have already posted a picture of the Guardian 's splash. Here are the other newspapers that have splashed on the Tory story.

The headlines speak for themselves.

enltrTIMES: Cameron: I blame Osborne #tomorrowspaperstoday #bbcpapers pic.twitter.com/MMfu0YMpWB

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrFT POLITICAL LEAD: Cameron fights to calm civil war by @_Kate_Allen enltrFT POLITICAL LEAD: Cameron fights to calm civil war by #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrFT POLITICAL LEAD: Cameron fights to calm civil war by pic.twitter.com/0kU0Fac09W enltrFT POLITICAL LEAD: Cameron fights to calm civil war by

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrTELEGRAPH: PM fights back to save his party #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrTELEGRAPH: PM fights back to save his party #bbcpapers enltrTELEGRAPH: PM fights back to save his party pic.twitter.com/nRzoDqtdDz enltrTELEGRAPH: PM fights back to save his party

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— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrINDEPENDENT: IDS twists the knife #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrINDEPENDENT: IDS twists the knife #bbcpapers enltrINDEPENDENT: IDS twists the knife pic.twitter.com/Qrnj3zS2up enltrINDEPENDENT: IDS twists the knife

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrDAILY MAIL: Civil war engulfs Tories #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrDAILY MAIL: Civil war engulfs Tories #bbcpapers enltrDAILY MAIL: Civil war engulfs Tories pic.twitter.com/K8Qh4XBj2r enltrDAILY MAIL: Civil war engulfs Tories

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrMIRROR: Damned #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrMIRROR: Damned #bbcpapers enltrMIRROR: Damned pic.twitter.com/jcEYnWwPE7 enltrMIRROR: Damned

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrCITY AM: Moody Blues #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrCITY AM: Moody Blues pic.twitter.com/pnpZYLXLIW enltrCITY AM: Moody Blues

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 enltrMORNING STAR: Just tear it up and try again #tomorrowspaperstoday enltrMORNING STAR: Just tear it up and try again pic.twitter.com/6jmQvpbyf6 enltrMORNING STAR: Just tear it up and try again

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.16am GMT

block-time published-time 8.59am GMT

There will be at least two statements in the Commons today.

David Cameron will make a statement at 3.30pm. The prime minister always delivers a statement to MPs after he has attended an EU summit, to report to them on what has happened, and Number 10 has indicated that he will use this to respond to Iain Duncan Smith by affirming his support for “compassionate Conservatism”. When a minister is making a statement on one subject (ie, an EU summit), the Speaker does not normally allow questions on another (ie, Iain Duncan Smith, or the budget), but John Bercow may allow some flexibility this afternoon in the light of the strong public interest in what Cameron has to say about the IDS row.

Then we will get a statement from Stephen Crabb, the new work and pensions secretary, on the Personal Independence Payment.

That means the budget debate will not start until at least 6pm. Greg Clark, the communities secretary, will open for the government.

block-time published-time 8.36am GMT

Corbyn calls on Osborne to follow IDS and resign The Conservative party is in turmoil and Iain Duncan Smith’s resignation has inflamed two conflicts that have been simmering in the party for years: the Leave/Remain feud over the EU ; and the dispute between One Nation Conservatism and Thatcherite Toryism. It is often assumed that the Thatcherites are always in the Leave camp but, just to make things complicated, Duncan Smith, a prominent anti-EU figure, attacked David Cameron and George Osborne in his resignation letter for betraying the One Nation tradition.

Today we will get the Cameron fightback because he is giving a statement in the Commons.

Here is the Guardian ’s overnight story.

Related: Iain Duncan Smith broadside leaves David Cameron facing test of unity

Here is our splash.

enltrGUARDIAN: Tories plunge into open warfare #tomorrowspaperstoday #bbcpapers pic.twitter.com/mRN5w0V6Jz

— Neil Henderson (@hendopolis) March 20, 2016 And here are the latest overnight developments.

* No 10 says Cameron will fight back in the Commons this afternoon by expressing his commitment to “a modern, compassionate Conservatism”.

* Stephen Crabb, the new work and pensions secretary, is expected to tell MPs that the proposed cuts to Personal Independent Payments will not go ahead.

* Jeremy Corbyn , the Labour leader, has restated his call for Osborne to resign. He told BBC1’s Breakfast:

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The budget doesn’t add up. The chancellor of the exchequer should come back to Parliament and explain that.

Far from just Iain Duncan Smith resigning, if a chancellor puts forward a Budget - as he did - knowing full well that he is making this huge hit on the disabled, then really it should perhaps be him who should be considering his position.

His budget simply doesn’t add up and it unravelled within hours of him presenting it. This isn’t the first time a George Osborne Budget has unravelled.

It seems to me we need to look at the very heart of this government, at its incompetence, at the way it puts forward proposals that simply don’t add up and expects the most needy in our society to take the hit for them.

Jeremy Corbyn has called for Osborne’s resignation

* The Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston has used an interview with Today to suggest the Tories should abandon their promise not to cut benefits for wealthy pensioners.

* Michael Howard , the former Conservative leader, has used an interview with Today to defend Osborne.

enltrHoward says Osborne should be judged on his 'outstanding' record, 'not the end of the world' to rethink one element of the Budget

— Laura Kuenssberg (@bbclaurak) March 21, 2016 I will be focusing mostly on this story today. Here are the key moments to watch out for.

11am: Number 10 lobby briefing

3.30pm: David Cameron makes a statement to the Commons.

Around 5pm: MPs resume their debate on the budget.

I will also be covering other breaking political news as it happens, as well as bringing you the best reaction, comment and analysis from the web. I will post a summary at lunchtime and another in the afternoon.

If you want to follow me or contact me on Twitter , I’m on @AndrewSparrow. , I’m on

I try to monitor the comments BTL but normally I find it impossible to read them all. If you have a direct question, do include “Andrew” in it somewhere and I’m more likely to find it. I do try to answer direct questions, although sometimes I miss them or don’t have time. Alternatively you could post a question to me on Twitter .

If you think there are any voices that I’m leaving out, particularly political figures or organisations giving alternative views of the stories I’m covering, do please flag them up below the line (include “Andrew” in the post). I can’t promise to include everything, but I do try to be open to as wide a range of perspectives as possible.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 3.09pm GMT

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Mail Online

News

Bill Shorten backtracks on promise to end the 'tampon tax' despite calling them 'essential items'

DANIEL NOUR FOR DAILY MAIL AUSTRALIA

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DAMONL
English
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* The Opposition Leader said he would keep the tax at a forum last night

* Last year Labor said tampons were 'essentials' like condoms, lubricant

* This morning he said Labor has always been open to removing the tax

* Joe Hockey stumbled his way through the same question last year

Bill Shorten has backtracked on a promise to lift the so-called tampon tax if a Labor government is elected in July.

The Opposition Leader was unequivocal when he answered 'no' when asked at a public forum on Wednesday night whether a government he leads would lift the tax.

But by Thursday morning Labor appeared to be in disarray on the issue, with Mr Shorten's office trying to explain that lifting the unpopular tax was still a possibility if alternative funding sources could be found.

Scroll down for video

Mr Shorten said on Wednesday night said he would not guarantee the tax would go, because ‘I’m not going to make a promise that I can’t keep.’

He quickly changed the subject, plunging into an explanation of other Opposition policies like ‘people getting the healthcare they need.’

On Thursday, his office released a statement on the issue that said: ‘Labor has always been open to removing the GST from sanitary items.

‘If we can get the agreement of all jurisdictions and if an alternative revenue source can be identified.’

Labor also said it would offset the $120m which would be lost through revenue from tampons and sanitary products with a new tax on digital downloads, like Netflix.

Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen said money from the so-called Netflix tax could have paid for removing the tampon tax, but the states refused that offer.

‘Bill was just making that clear last night,’ he told ABC radio.

He in turn pointed the finger at former treasurer Joe Hockey for failing to make this clear.

For his part, Mr Hockey also stumbled, blushed and grinned when asked about the tampon tax at an episode of the ABC's Q&A program last year.

Answering the question, ‘Do you think sanitary products are an essential health good for half the population,’ Mr Hockey said: ‘I think so.’

The former treasurer agreed to lobby states to ditch the tax but in the end he also said nothing could be done.

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theguardian

Society
Women's Aid launches scheme to tackle hidden domestic abuse

Damien Gayle
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Comic Relief and ‘tampon tax’ fund plan to identify and help victims, including those suffering coercive control

Hairdressers, priests and even Avon reps will be recruited and trained to look out for possible victims of domestic violence as part of a scheme to help women trapped in abusive relationships.

Women’s Aid, a domestic abuse charity covering England, in partnership with Welsh Women’s Aid, is calling for people whose work embeds them in communities to become ambassadors and reach out to those being victimised by partners.

The participants will be asked to be alert to warning signs of domestic abuse, such as non-physical coercive control. If they believe someone could be in danger they are asked to give individuals advice on available local services.

The scheme was launched on Wednesday. At first it will be run as a pilot in three areas across England and Wales, with the aim of extending nationally, as part of the effort to identify, early on, women experiencing domestic abuse. The scheme is funded through Comic Relief and money from the now defunct tampon tax.

Related: Tampon tax: £15m raised to be spent on women's charities

The Ask Me pilot scheme arose after Women’s Aid workers discovered that victims of domestic abuse often reported that people in their local communities had missed opportunities to help them.

Fifty community ambassadors will be selected for each area and will be given two days’ training to help them understand and spot the signs of domestic abuse, and direct women towards further help and support. They will not unilaterally call the police over any suspicions.

Asked who the ideal candidate for the job would be, a spokesperson for Women’s Aid said: “I guess really a hairdresser would be ideal. There’s a lot of small talk that happens there and relationships built. Also in religious communities as well, if there is a priest or a rabbi or somebody that someone can confide in. Obviously, their job won’t allow them to go to the police but they can give advice [about] what to do. It’s really important for Women’s Aid to reach the religious communities as well.”

Women’s Aid hopes to attract interest also from community and voluntary sector workers, local community champions, Jobcentre workers, community centres, food banks, youth centres, criminal justice agencies, court personnel, children’s centre staff, health and education professionals, housing offices, and drug and alcohol services.

Businesses taking part in the scheme will display a sign that shows they provide a safe place for talking about the abuse.

Registration for the scheme is open from Wednesday for professionals in the pilot areas, which include Brighton & Hove and East Sussex; Kensington and Chelsea, Westminster, and Hammersmith and Fulham in London; and Powys, Wales.

Polly Neate, chief executive of Women’s Aid in England, said: “Many women live with abuse for years without telling anyone and often have contact with several agencies or people in their local community before they get help. These women have few opportunities to disclose their abuse because their space for action is extremely limited.

“Therefore, when an opportunity occurs, it is vital they receive the right support. Most people are not open to hearing that abuse is happening, or do not know how to respond appropriately. Our Ask Me initiative will

equip individuals in local communities with the basic skills, knowledge and tools to have a supportive conversation and provide an appropriate response.”

Eleri Butler, chief executive of Welsh Women’s Aid, said: “Living with abuse in rural areas means survivors are further isolated and it’s vitally important they have effective routes to safety and support. So we are pleased to be working in partnership with Women’s Aid in England, to pilot how local community ambassadors in Wales can help increase understanding of domestic abuse and [indicate] support provided by the Wales Live Fear-Free Helpline and specialist services.”

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theguardian

Politics
'Tampon tax': PM gets support from EU leaders for looser VAT rules

Rowena Mason and Alberto Nardelli
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Prime minister bolsters efforts to remove VAT on sanitary products as campaigners and Eurosceptics join forces

David Cameron has secured support from all other EU leaders for looser VAT rules that will allow the UK to cancel the tax on women's sanitary products, British officials have said.

With Brussels due to publish proposals for a VAT shakeup within days, the prime minister raised the issue with Jean-Claude Juncker, the European commission president, making clear he favours letting member states set the tax at zero for certain products.

At a session on the economy, Cameron got all 27 other EU leaders to agree that they "welcomed the intention" of the commission to propose flexibility on zero rating for VAT on some products.

George Osborne, the chancellor, claimed victory for the government, arguing it was a sign of what the UK could achieve by engaging with the EU, although the VAT shakeup was already planned by the commission.

"We heard people's anger over paying the tampon tax loud and clear. We said we'd said we'd fight for agreement to reduce the VAT rate to zero, and tonight all European leaders have welcomed our plan to do just that. We've achieved what no British government has even tried to achieve. "It just shows how Britain can make a case for a reform that will benefit millions as a powerful, confident voice inside a reformed EU."

UK officials said the European commission had signed up to the change and would put forward proposals next week. A formal announcement is expected on Wednesday, though the implementation of new rates may take some time to be approved.

The proposals will come just in time for the UK government, which was facing an attempt by Labour and Eurosceptic MPs to force a vote in favour of scrapping the so-called tampon tax in a budget debate in the House of Commons on Tuesday.

Labour MPs and Tory Eurosceptics are banding together to back an amendment by Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP for Dewsbury and Mirfield, aimed at allowing MPs to remove the 5% VAT levied on sanitary products – something EU rules forbid.

In an attempt to avoid a humiliating defeat, George Osborne, the chancellor, stressed on Thursday morning that the EU was "on the verge" of a deal to allow him to strike down the tax, something he omitted to mention in his budget announcement on Wednesday, before the scale of the likely rebellion became clear.

Under one option to be put forward by the European commission, member states would be able to cut rates on goods or services provided that reduced or zero rates had already been granted to another member state. Since Ireland has a 0% rate for tampons, that same possibility would be extended to all member states, including the UK

Under the second option, countries would be free to adopt rates on a selection of goods and services, provided this did not create risks of unfair tax competition or unduly complicate the VAT system. Both options would allow the UK to scrap VAT on sanitary products, but would need to be agreed by all member states.

Following the agreement, Sherriff said she now wanted the government to now give in and accept her amendment. "We expect this decision to be reflected in this year's Budget, with a clear timetable for abolition of the tampon tax in the UK. My amendment would allow that, so I hope that the chancellor will announce now that he will accept it. There is no excuse not to act now, and reform is long overdue - 2017 should be a

deadline not an aspiration. In the meantime, the chancellor should guarantee that essential women's services won't depend on a tax on essential women's products."

Speaking ahead of Thursday evening's agreement, Osborne told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme he "perfectly understood" people's anger over the 5% VAT rating on tampons and said he was hoping for a breakthrough within the next few days. Treasury minister David Gauke wrote to the commission in November, setting out the UK's call for change.

In his autumn statement, the chancellor had sought to quell anger about the issue by setting aside the revenue from the VAT to be spent on causes that benefit women, and in his latest budget he allocated £12m for those causes, including domestic violence charities.

On Thursday night it was not clear whether the charities involved would be compensated for the loss of this income once the 0% rating is in place.

Related: Budget 2016: Osborne says Britain on verge of getting Brussels agreement to scrap tampon tax - Politics live

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theguardian

Opinion
How to win a feminist battle – six activists share their secrets

Leymah Gbowee, Laura Coryton, Krystyna Kacpura, Lucy-Anne Holmes, Jaha Dukureh and Antonia Ayres-Brown
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From helping to end a civil war to fighting the tampon tax, six women explain how their campaigns achieved the unimaginable

Leymah Gwobee : A group of mothers ended Liberia's civil war Liberia was very effective at killing itself during the civil war. Our population is around 4.5 million people, and during the 14-year-long civil war around 250,000 people were killed, and many more displaced. The use of child soldiers, sexual violence and attacks on civilians were rife during the conflict.

In April 2003, seven of us gathered in a makeshift office to discuss the Liberian civil war and the fact that the fighting was fast approaching the capital, Monrovia. Armed with nothing but our conviction and $10, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign was born. We felt it was our moral duty to stand up as Liberian mothers to protect the lives of our children, the land and their future.

We were united in our belief that non-violent action was the only way we would see peace in Liberia. We would not pick up weapons. Instead, we organised daily sit-ins, pickets, vigils, street protests and demonstrations to demand an immediate ceasefire, a dialogue among the warring parties and the deployment of an intervention force.

We needed a way to make sure the men in our communities were equally committed to ending the conflict. A sex strike made our cause more personal, and helped us raise our media profile to reinforce our demands on the warring parties.

Three weeks into the mass action, President Charles Taylor agreed to meet with us. This meeting was attended by more than 2,000 women, and resulted in his agreement to attend the peace talks in Ghana.

Our next challenge was to ensure that the peace talks resulted in an agreement that was in the best interest of Liberians, and not simply serving the personal interests of the warlords. We partnered with Liberian women who were refugees in Ghana, and became the moral voice and face of the peace talks, while keeping the pressure on by continuing the protest in Monrovia at the same time.

Once the peace agreement was signed, we stepped in as mediators to get combatants to comply with the terms of the agreement, and also to get the UN and the transitional government of Liberia to provide the necessary incentives for the fighters.

We were ordinary mothers who decided it was no longer enough to beg for peace. Instead, we came together to demand peace, justice, equality and inclusion in political decision-making. We used our bodies, broken by hunger, poverty, desperation and destitution, to stare down the barrel of the gun.

Fourteen years later, we can comfortably say that we did the unimaginable.

Laura Coryton : Time was called on the tampon tax Menstruation and taxation aren't hugely popular topics and yet thanks to the 320,086 amazing campaigners who signed my Change.org petition, we are finally bringing the sexist tax on tampons and sanitary products to an end. Our government deemed tampons to be "luxury" items when it introduced the tax in 1973, while it considered maintaining private jets, crocodile steaks and even sugar flowers essential enough to avoid tax altogether. Seriously. Even Barack Obama has spoken out against tampon taxes in 40 US states.

Running this petition-led campaign over the past few years has been amazing and it's always so much fun to connect with inspiring campaigners. But it has been a lot of work, and not all of it has been positive. Twitter trolls, government opposition and even threatening letters in the post have surprised and sometimes

discouraged me, but it's important to never give up on something you believe in, especially when it unfairly targets over half of our population simply because they're women. Having loved Caroline Criado-Perez's petition to get Jane Austen on British banknotes, I was inspired to start my own against tampon tax in May 2014. Soon, universities across the UK decided to give sanitary products away for free or to sell them at a reduced rate in their student unions. Communities also came together to form local campaigning forums, and individuals took the initiative to start their own sister campaigns from Australia to Malaysia.

We finally made history in 2016 when the then chancellor, George Osborne, committed the House of Commons to axe tampon tax "when legally able". EU taxation regulations mean we need to wait for Brexit to be finalised before the tax can be scrapped. Osborne estimated this would be in April 2018, but his successor, Philip Hammond, has yet to comment. In the meantime we need to keep talking, tweeting and campaigning to make sure Theresa May knows we're waiting for her to stop taxing periods. Period.

Krystyna Kacpura : Poland abandoned its Stop Abortion Initiative I have worked in the field of sexual and reproductive rights for many years. I fought several attempts to further limit the already restrictive anti-abortion law in Poland. However, it was the Stop Abortion Initiative that made me not only personally outraged, but also frightened. Who dares to create hell on earth for Polish women? Who hates us so much?

My first thought was to immediately inform women about what the bill meant in practice: imprisonment and a forced birth in all circumstances, even at the risk of the mother's own life and health, in cases of rape or incest, or when the foetus is malformed or has genetic defects. In cases of miscarriage, a police investigation and imprisonment, too. These were only some of the more drastic provisions of this project.

Related: This victory on abortion has empowered Polish women. We'll never be the same | Krystyna Kacpura

We prepared short, straight-to-the-point leaflets,handing them out to women on the streets, in shops, offices and schools. Many of them called us later in terrible fear. Some could not believe that anyone would want to treat women with such horror. Now we needed to turn that fear into outrage, protest and women's solidarity. We made comparisons with women's reproductive rights in other European countries and supported and empowered women to make them feel stronger in this unequal battle. We mobilised them to actively engage in demonstrations, marches and street debates.

In my speeches, I asked women for solidarity and joint struggle above any divisions. In later demonstrations, I called on politicians to stand with us. I also made an appeal to gynaecologists, asking them to spread honest and comprehensive information regarding the consequences of the proposal. And there were doctors who were on our side, secretly. They visited MPs or wrote them letters, detailing the risks for women.

It was like I was in a trance: thousands of individual conversations; dozens of debates, demonstrations, marches; hundreds of phone calls, emails. I knew I had to find the strength to keep going. When I was tired, I opened my drawer with the signatures of hundreds of Poles under the Save Women Initiative – a reminder that all those people trusted me and my organisation.

We won the battle. The barbaric project was withdrawn. However, the fight for our reproductive rights is not over yet. We do not put our umbrellas down.

Lucy-Anne Holmes : The Sun ended Page 3 During the 2012 London Olympics, I bought the Sun to read about Team GB, particularly Jessica Ennis, when I realised that the biggest image of a woman was on Page 3. This looming half-page picture of a nearly naked woman really jarred for me, and I found I couldn't stop thinking about it. This was our biggest-selling newspaper – what did it say about a woman's place in society?

I wrote a long letter to the editor of the Sun, bullet pointing all the reasons I thought he should end the 42-year "tradition", but I knew it would achieve nothing. So, very randomly really, as I had never done anything like it at all, I started an online petition, Facebook page, Twitter account and had a few "No More Page 3" T-shirts printed.

Related: The Sun's Page 3 is the highly visible tip of misogyny's iceberg | Deoborah Orr

I was incredibly optimistic to start with. I thought it was such a no-brainer that I set the signature total for one million, and fully expected Page 3 to be history by Christmas.

Page 3 actually saw another three Christmases before it ended in January 2015. The campaign ended up taking two and a half years and reached nearly 250,000 signatures on the petition.

I burnt out after six months, but then reached out to people to start a team, which was when the magic really started. Together we weathered the responses of "you're frigid/ugly/jealous" or "you're only doing this because you've got shit tits" and being wished dead. A wonderful community of supporters formed; charities and unions backed us; regional groups appeared; there were protests and comedy nights; poems, plays and songs were written and performed.

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It was very grassroots, pretty chaotic but always passionate and, importantly, I think, kind. It was quite a ride.

Jaha Dukureh : FGM was banned in the Gambia

Making the decision to take my campaign against female genital mutilation (FGM) back to the Gambia, although difficult, was the right thing to do. Standing up against FGM within society is often a cause for isolation, so through doing this work, I had to make peace with the fact that often I would be forced to stand up on my own. Although there had been other anti-FGM campaigns on the ground, I understood that in order for change to really occur, there needed to be a different approach. Being a young woman, I knew it would be difficult for others to listen to me, and the dangers I would face from tackling such an issue. This meant that it was crucial for me to have a team with me; to find people equally dedicated to the cause who would stand by me. Then we could work more efficiently and effectively.

Instead of focusing on just one person, one region or one ethnic group, we worked with the whole country at once. We held discussions not just with religious leaders, but also the younger generation, initiating conversations around FGM in ways that had never been done. It was important to us that the message be disseminated on a local level, a national level and a global level. By making the conscious decision to leave no one behind, by understanding the power in numbers, our message to end FGM was heard louder and clearer, and the decision to ban FGM was announced in late 2015.

Our form of resistance came from refusing to stay silent and igniting flames within each community, so that everyone's voice could be heard.

Antonia Ayres-Brown : McDonald's ended the gender bias in its toys As a young girl, I felt puzzled every time my brother and I ordered McDonald's Happy Meals and received different toys – he usually got cars and action figures while I was offered dolls and stickers. When I was 11, I wrote a letter to the CEO of McDonald's asking why they gave different toys based on gender. The curt response I received from a McDonald's representative explained that the company did not designate "girls' toys" versus "boys' toys" and that my experience was atypical.

This dismissal frustrated me. I knew from experience that in practice it happened quite often. Although disappointed, the response only pushed me to gather more evidence.

In 2013, I helped to organise a study in which children between the ages of seven and 11 ordered Happy Meals in a series of visits to 15 local McDonald's franchises. On 93% of visits, McDonald's gave the kids, without asking, the toy that was assumed to correspond with their gender (the boys' toys were Power Rangers while the girls' toys were sponsored by a clothing store, Justice). We even observed a worker falsely tell a girl that the restaurant had run out of Power Rangers toys; five minutes later, the same employee automatically gave this "boys' toy" to a boy from our study who ordered a Happy Meal.

Related: The fightback against gendered toys

I wrote again to the CEO, sharing my evidence and expressing concern about the consequences of reinforcing gender stereotypes through gendered categorisation of toys. This time, the chief diversity officer of McDonald's responded, stating that the company was re-evaluating its policies to ensure that toys would not be labelled as "girls' toys" and "boys' toys" in future. Since then, I've visited several McDonald's across the US and observed consistent gender-neutral labelling of toys. Perhaps most gratifying are the messages I've received from parents expressing how excited their kids have been to know that they aren't "wrong" to prefer certain kinds of toys over others.

This project by no means tackled the most pressing challenges to gender equality, such as sexual violence and disparate pay, which affect women (particularly those of colour) in the US today. However, this partial victory against a corporate behemoth may help deconstruct the gender stereotypes that contemporary culture drills into children. I also hope it serves as proof for other young women, regardless of their age, that we are never too young to identify and address instances (even small ones) of unfairness.

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THE SUNDAY TIMES

News
Anti-abortion charity gets 'tampon tax' cash

Elizabeth Beynon
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An anti-abortion charity is benefiting from government handouts as part of the redistribution of the so-called tampon tax.

Life, which was founded in 1970, has received a grant of £250,000 for a west London-based project to give housing, counselling and life skills training to pregnant, homeless women.

The grant has angered some women's groups. The End Violence Against Women Coalition told The Observer: "We are surprised to see that Life is the recipient of a very significant tampon tax grant.

"The government set out clearly that this money would be spent in ways that would address women's specific needs and inequalities.

"It is hard to understand how a service offering counselling based on the fundamental premise that abortion is wrong, to vulnerable women, can do that."

The money — £15m in the current financial year — comes from the 5% VAT charge on sanitary products, set by the EU. After pressure for the tax to be scrapped last year, George Osborne, then the chancellor, pledged that women's charities would benefit from the cash. It was later announced that he hoped to reach a deal with the EU, which sets 5% as the minimum rate for VAT, to cut it to zero.

The money has been split between 70 charities, ranging from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust to the Women's Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre in Cornwall.

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Mail Online

News

Government is criticised after a quarter of a million pounds is given to an anti-abortion charity out of £12m tampon tax pot intended to support disadvantaged women

FIONN HARGREAVES FOR MAILONLINE

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* Pro-life charity Life aims to campaign until 'abortion is a thing of the past'

* On Friday, the government pledged millions to help British women and children

* The move was criticised by women's aid groups and female politicians

A quarter of a million pounds has been given to an anti-abortion charity out of a £12 million tampon tax pot.

The donation has been given to Life, a charity that plans to campaign until 'abortion is a thing of the past'.

On Friday, the government promised to donate £12 million raised from the tampon tax to help vulnerable women and children in Britain.

But female politicians and women's aid groups have criticised the choice of organisation.

End Violence Against Women told the Observer : 'We are surprised to see that Life is the recipient of a very significant tampon tax grant.

'It is hard to understand how a service offering counselling based on the fundamental premise that abortion is wrong, to vulnerable women, can do that.'

Life told the paper: 'We believe that our support services for women are not a luxury but are essential.'

In March, End Violence Against Women welcomed Philip Hammond's promise to donate money raised by the tampon tax to women's aid charities.

In a statement, they wrote: 'This money is desperately needed in the context of cuts to many specialist services and increased levels of reporting of violence against women and girls.'

On Life's website, the charity wrote: 'We won’t give up until those facing difficult pregnancies can choose life and abortion is a thing of the past.'

They aim 'to create a just society which has the utmost respect for all human life from fertilisation'.

Other critics of the donation include the Women's Equality Party and Labour MP Paula Sherriff.

Currently, sanitary products face a five per cent tax as they are classed as a 'luxury'.

In 2015, campaigner Laura Croyton started an online petition to end the tampon tax, which gathered more than 320,000 signatures.

In 2016, David Cameron announced the tampon tax would be scrapped, but this has now been pushed back to April 2018.

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theguardian

Politics
Anti-abortion group in tampon tax row removes death penalty comparison

Alice Ross
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Charity comes under criticism for receiving £250,000 from government's tampon tax, but insists support services are unbiased and non-judgemental

A charity that has been given £250,000 from the government's so-called tampon tax fund has scrubbed language describing abortion after rape as a "death penalty" from its website after being challenged on it.

The Life charity has now said it will do a full review of its website to remove offensive language, after the Guardian pointed out that the same article referred to abortion in cases of disability as a "death sentence".

Life, which campaigns against abortion, was among 70 organisations working with women and girls to receive funding from the £12m tampon tax fund set up by George Osborne.

Related: A tampon tax is bad enough. Using it to fund anti-abortionists is a disgrace | Suzanne Moore

The £250,000 funding will go into housing and counselling services run by Life for homeless pregnant women in west London, the government announced. But the decision to award Life funding provoked concern among some women's groups.

On Monday, Life's education director Anne Scanlan was challenged on the BBC Radio 4's Today programme about a piece on the charity's website in which abortion after rape was described as a "death penalty".

Ann Furedi, of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, brought up the phrasing and said: "You cannot be saying on one hand that you provide an unbiased, non-judgemental approach to dealing with women when this is the ideological motivation of your organisation."

Scanlan responded: "I cannot believe we use that terminology at all, we would absolutely never use that kind of language face to face when dealing with women."

The article was swiftly edited on Monday morning to remove the description. However, the same article still referred to abortion in cases of disability as a "death sentence".

When the Guardian pointed this out, Scanlan said the language was inappropriate and offensive, and pledged to review all content on the website. "Where inappropriate language was used, we will amend it or remove it," she said.

"We offer help and support to women. We certainly don't want anything on the website that's offensive," Scanlan said. "We are not going to shy away from it: we are an anti-abortion organisation. But I was genuinely surprised to find out that language was being used on our website."

Scanlan said she did not know how long the article had been online but believed it was written before she arrived at Life six years ago and had slipped through the net when the website was revamped last year. "Unfortunately a whole swathe of briefing papers have been moved from the old website without being adequately checked," she said.

Related: The 'tampon tax' is not a marginal issue - it's the force of structural sexism at work | Gabrielle Jackson

She denied that the group's opposition to abortion made it unsuitable to receive the tampon tax funding. "We never, ever try to push our views onto anybody else," she said, adding Life provides "non-directive counselling" that avoids recommending any particular course of action. "When it comes to providing support for women, we're not debating the issue: we are just providing support," she added.

Furedi told the Guardian she did not believe it was possible to separate Life's opposition to abortion from the advice it provides to women. "Organisations are led by their values, and that runs through advocacy and campaigning, but it also runs through the way services are delivered," she said, adding: "What they are saying is abortion has, as far as they are concerned, no place in the management of problem pregnancy."

The government's decision to provide funding to an anti-abortion organisation was a "slap in the face" to public opinion, which is increasingly supportive of choice, Furedi said, pointing out that the £250,000 was among the largest grants handed out: "Every woman who's buying sanitary protection is being caused to effectively make a donation [to Life]". The charity has a turnover of £3.6m a year.

A spokesperson for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which determines how the tampon tax fund is distributed, said the money is being spent to "help improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls, including those who have been affected by violence," adding: "Life has been awarded £250,000 to fund a specific project in west London that will help homeless and other at risk women who are pregnant by providing housing, counselling and life skills training."

The government declined to comment on whether it had any concerns about providing significant funding to an avowedly pro-life organisation.

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theguardian

Business
Tesco absorbs tampon tax for customers by cutting prices

Timothy Wyatt
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Supermarket covers 5% VAT on women's sanitary products for own-label and other brands following campaign

Tesco has become the first UK supermarket to cover the cost of the tampon tax for customers, after it cut the price of nearly 100 women's sanitary products by 5%.

The retailer said that the move – which sees Tesco absorb the cost of VAT, set at 5% on sanitary items – would help women who found themselves in financial difficulty.

Related: Tesco cuts price of women's razors so they cost the same as men's

Michelle McEttrick, Tesco group brand director, said: "For many of our customers, tampons, panty-liners and sanitary towels are essential products. However, the cost of buying them every month can add up, and for many women and girls it can be a real struggle on top of other essential items. That's why we are reducing the cost of these products by 5%."

The price cut will affect both Tesco's own-label items and more well-known brands.

Campaigners have been demanding that the government scraps VAT entirely on women's sanitary products for years, but due to EU rules it has been unable to lower the rate below 5%.

To stave off a backbench rebellion by an unlikely alliance of feminist and Eurosceptic MPs, David Cameron persuaded European ministers last year to agree to change the rules to allow zero-rating of sanitary products. But the earliest a new law could come into force would be 2018.

Until then, the government promised to spend the revenue from the tax on women's charities, initially including the anti-abortion and pregnancy counselling organisation Life. In March, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announced the latest tranche of grants, which took the total handed out to £17m.

Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP who has led the campaign against the tampon tax, has praised Tesco's decision and called on its rivals to follow suit. She said: "It would have been completely unacceptable if abolishing the tampon tax had just led to big businesses boosting their bottom line at the expense of women buying what are essential goods, which is why we pushed the supermarkets to sign up to a deal to pass the cut on.

"But this goes a step even further, by reducing prices right now – and I hope the other big retailers now consider doing the same." The government and the EU should now announce a clear timetable for abolishing VAT on sanitary items altogether, Sherriff also said.

Five major supermarkets – Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons and Waitrose – and Boots, the high street chemist, had originally pledged last year to pass the savings on to customers when the VAT is finally removed.

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News
Tesco removes 'tampon tax' from sanitary items

By Pascale Hughes
341 words
29 July 2017
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English
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News | CONSUMER

Tesco has become the first UK retailer to remove the so-called "tampon tax" from women's sanitary products in a move which will save women hundreds of pounds over the course of their lifetimes.

The supermarket cut the prices of tampons, sanitary towels and panty liners by 5 per cent.

Campaigners have long argued that VAT should not be charged on sanitary products as they are essential items. But the European Union classifies them as luxury items and has insisted on a 5 per cent charge.

In November 2015 George Osborne, the then chancellor, said that the £15m the tax raises annually would be been given to women's refuges and domestic abuse charities. The following March the Government pledged to remove the tax as the EU softened its stance and said it would allow member states to cease charging. No date has been set but the EU hopes to have passed the legislation by the end of this year.

Mr Osborne's announcement of the "Tampon Tax Fund" was met with anger by some who said it implied domestic violence was something that should be tackled by women, rather than society as whole.

Tesco has now decided to remove the tax unilaterally. Michelle McEttrick, Tesco group brand director, said: "For many of our customers, tampons, panty liners and sanitary towels are essential products.

"However, the cost of buying them every month can add up, and for many women and girls it can be a real struggle on top of other essential items."

Last March, Tesco, along with Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and Boots pledged that the price of sanitary products would be reduced in line with the abolition of the levy.

Paula Sherriff, the Labour MP for Dewsbury and Mirfield who led the campaign to abolish VAT on women's sanitary products, has welcomed the announcement, adding: "It would have been completely unacceptable if abolishing the tampon tax had just led to big businesses boosting their bottom line."

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Mail Online

News

Waitrose becomes the latest supermarket chain to cut the price of sanitary products by paying the tampon tax themselves

KATE FERGUSON, POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR MAILONLINE
409 words
8 August 2017
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* Waitrose followed in Tesco's footsteps and announced it is paying the 5% tax

* Campaigners welcomed the move and urged other retailers to do the same

* Osborne last year announced plans to scrap the 'sexist' tax after public outcry

* The plans have been boged down in Brussels and women are still paying the VAT

Waitrose today became the latest supermarket chain to announce it will pay the cost of the tampon tax and pass the savings on to its customers.

The retailer is following in the footsteps of Tesco, which last week announced it will foot the bill of the five per cent tax - the reduced VAT rate levied on tampons.

George Osborne last year announced plans to scrap the tax after a campaign to scrap the 'sexist' levy.

A staggering 320,088 people signed a petition demanding the tax be scrapped.

But the move has been bogged down in Brussels as under current rules the EU has to agree to any change to VAT rates.

The UK will be able to finally abolish the tax when we quit the bloc in March 2019, but in the meantime high street giants are taking the matter into their own hands.

Waitrose said it will lower the price of its sanitary products over the course of this week.

Michael Andrews, director of buying at the chain, said: ‘By covering the VAT cost and reducing the price by five per cent, we are confident it will make a difference to our customers.’

The move was praised by campaigners who immediately called on other supermarket chains to follow suit and pay the tax.

The All party Parliamentary Group on Women's Health said: 'Very pleased Waitrose has become the second major UK supermarket to announce it will pay the tampon tax on behalf of its customers.'

The campaigning petitions website page 38 degrees urged its followers to tweet the supermarket chain Asda to encourage them to do the same.

In a message, they wrote: 'Waitrose has just announced they'll scrap the cost of the tampon tax on sanitary products too! TWEET Asda calling on them to do it as well.'

Monica Lennon, a Labour member of the Scottish Parliament, wrote on Twitter: 'Another victory for #tampontax & #periodpoverty campaigners. Sanitary products are not luxuries; they're essential.'

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theguardian

Society
How Scotland is putting a stop to period poverty

Kirstie Brewer
1,738 words
9 August 2017
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A pilot scheme giving away sanitary products through food banks aims to help low-income women and break down taboos

When faced with a choice between buying food for their children or tampons for themselves, the four mothers I am talking to in an Aberdeen food bank all say they will deprive themselves, with no hesitation.

It can be humiliating and messy, but they say they will make do with wads of tissue. Other women will improvise with rags, or even socks held in place with sticky tape.

“It’s a real choice for lots of women to have to make,” says Kerry Wright, a single mother of three children. “You’ll just be praying that your period doesn’t start at the stage in the month when there isn’t much food in the cupboard.”

Related: Lib Dems to provide free sanitary towels at school to fight 'period poverty'

Period poverty is something Wright, 35, has endured ever since she started menstruating as a teen and she is determined to prevent her own daughter AGED X?? having the same experiences. “I have four sisters and our parents were addicts so they didn’t care about making sure we had things for our periods – we would use toilet roll and we’d often miss school for a few days every month,” she says. “For the same thing to be happening 20 years down the line just doesn’t seem right.”

But for the next six months, women in Aberdeen on low incomes will have access to free sanitary products, due to what’s believed to be the world’s first government-backed scheme to tackle period poverty.

The £42,500 pilot, funded by the Scottish government, is being run by the Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE), a food bank and social enterprise. It will partner with local charities and target the city’s seven regeneration areas, to reach at least 1,000 women.

Scottish National party MSP Angela Constance, cabinet secretary for communities, social security and equalities, says there has been growing political interest in the issue and that food banks, women’s groups and student organisations have all put forward their concerns.

“We want to test the best way forward and look for a dignified, sensitive but very practical solution to this issue because it’s unacceptable that any woman or girl should be unable to access what is an essential item,” she says. “We shouldn’t be embarrassed to talk about menstruation and as a society we need to be better at talking about subjects considered to be taboo.”

Period poverty is a very private struggle for women throughout the UK and quantifying its extent has been hard. Constance says the valuation data collected by CFINE will be used to make the case for a nationwide rollout of free sanitary provision.

Kelly Donaldson, who has two sons and a daughter, says: “There will be one less thing for women to worry about – for the next six months at least”. She explains that the summer holidays can be particularly fraught, because money has to be found for the meals her children usually get free at school.

“I think the problem of period poverty will get worse because life has got tougher for folk around here – the government is cutting benefits left, right and centre and thrown people’s lives into chaos.”

It's unacceptable that any woman or girl should be unable to access what is an essential item.

Angela Constance, MSP

Over a woman's lifetime, sanitary products cost more than £5,000, with women spending around £13 every month. Labour reduced VAT on sanitary products from 17.5% to 5% in 2000 but said it could not go any further under EU rules. To stave off a backbench rebellion in March last year, David Cameron persuaded European ministers to agree to change the rules to allow zero-rating, but the earliest that could be implemented is 2018. In the meantime, his chancellor, George Osborne, promised to spend £15m from the so-called tampon tax on women's charities. This March, the latest tranche of grants took the total to £17m, but the scheme has been heavily criticised for making women fund support charities such as domestic violence refuges and for helping an anti-abortion group. The SNP has long called for the abolition of the "unfair" tax. Last month, Tesco became the first UK supermarket to effectively remove the VAT by cutting the price of many women's sanitary products.

Donaldson and Wright both volunteer at CFINE which gives out more than 800 emergency food parcels each month. According to CFINE chief executive Dave Simmers, demand has almost tripled since 2014. Before the pilot, women couldn't rely on sanitary products being included in their emergency parcels because the food bank can only distribute what people donate.

"The implementation of welfare reform has taken a terrible toll on families who are already up against it and on terribly low incomes," he says. "Struggling to afford sanitary products is just another burden for low-income women – who are normally the ones taking care of everyone else too."

He believes the debate around the tampon tax has helped to generate awareness of period poverty and kickstart action to put an end to it.

More than three-quarters of people who use CFINE's food bank are men, but partnering with other agencies should help the pilot to reach more of the city's vulnerable women. This includes as many as 300 mothers and daughters via the Aberdeen branch of Home-Start, a charity which makes home visits to vulnerable families with young children.

Related: Poverty 'driving people to choose between eating or keeping clean'

Cathy Beattie, team leader at Home-Start, says there is definitely a need out there, but that the problem has been hard to quantify because it isn't a natural talking point for the parents they are helping to keep out of crisis.

"This pilot is going to get people talking: some of the parents we see can't afford nappies and basics like milk – so those are the things they prioritise asking for because they put their children's needs first," she explains. Free sanitary products are always quietly taken whenever they are put among the nappies and food supplies on offer at the Friday morning parent and toddler group.

A few minutes drive away is the Tillydrone Community Flat, where local residents – some of the very poorest in Aberdeen – come for services including a creche, a small food bank, adult education classes, welfare advocacy and drug and alcohol counselling. Fiona Dallas, a development worker there, says she is angry about the way women are disproportionately affected by the austerity cuts and has already identified several women and girls who could be helped by the pilot.

"If you have two teenage daughters plus yourself, that's a lot of money to spend on sanitary products and you have to be very brave to ask for them at a food bank, when even asking for food is embarrassing," she says. "The number of women who use food banks is very low – they have fears about being seen to be a bad mother who is unable to feed her kids. They worry social services will get involved."

Dallas imagines that there are women who are missing benefit appointments and GP appointments because they don't have sanitary protection. "If you get very heavy periods it could be a real deterrent for women going out – there is so much stigma around it too," she says. "I've been annoyed for years about the tampon tax – if the government wanted to get rid of it they could have done it years ago, but they've chosen not to."

Related: Period poverty: call to tackle the hidden side of inequality

With the need so apparent, why has it taken this long for action to be taken at a government level?

Monica Lennon, the Labour backbench MSP for central Scotland, has been promoting the issue since winning her seat in May 2016 and believes it hasn't been high on the agenda because women have been under-represented in the places where decisions are taken.

"It will always be argued that there are more pressing issues to tackle but this is fundamental to women's human rights," she says. She would like to see a bolder commitment from the Scottish government. "It's a welcome start but I think we can be more ambitious when we know it's a problem in every community today."

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No decision yet has been made about the eligibility criteria under a potential rollout of the pilot. But Lennon is concerned that if it involves means-testing it would leave no safety net for people who might need help when life throws up unexpected challenges. She will launch a members bill consultation this month, proposing a universal provision scheme, similar to the NHS C-card, which offers young people free condoms in many parts of the UK.

Lennon would also like it to become a statutory requirement for free sanitary products to be provided in schools, colleges and universities. This has already been embraced by South Lanarkshire College in East Kilbride, which began offering free tampons and pads to students and staff in January and plans to install free sanitary product dispensers in toilets throughout the college.

At Sussex University the student union has been giving away free sanitary products one afternoon a month for several years as part of its free periods campaign sponsored by Natracare. It also promotes more sustainable reusable cups that can last a number of years, but that many women don't know about. CFINE is also trying to raise awareness of reusable sanitary products, including washable towels, by recruiting women to test them and give feedback to the Scottish government.

Back in Aberdeen, Wright and Donaldson have completed the forms for themselves and their daughters to take part in the CFINE pilot. They say the staff and volunteers at the food bank usually talk about politics, but now it's non-stop periods. "The more we all talk about periods and period poverty, the better – men included," says Wright. "This is a basic necessity we need in order to get on with our lives."

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The Observer

Politics
Anti-abortion Life charity will get cash from UK tampon tax

Ben Quinn
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Government confirms group will receive £250,000 despite outcry from MPs and women's groups

The government has confirmed that it is to award a quarter of a million pounds from an unpopular levy on women's sanitary products to an anti-abortion organisation, despite objections from women's groups and MPs.

There was a outcry earlier this year after the Observer revealed that £250,000 of the money raised from the so-called tampon tax – the 5% rate of VAT that is levied on sanitary products –would go to Life, a charity that campaigns against abortion.

The organisation also opposes plans for the expansion of sex education in primary schools and has been at the centre of controversy over the information provided by a network of unregulated pregnancy counselling centres.

Petitions opposing the grant gained half a million signatures, while under-pressure ministers subsequently said that the specifics of the grant agreements had yet to be finalised.

However, a reply by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to a Freedom of Information request has now revealed that the award from a £12m pot will be made, though Life will be "prohibited" from spending the money on publicity or on its controversial pregnancy counselling and education services.

Diana Johnson, one of a number of Labour MPs who had pressed the government to review the grant decision, said: "This decision is not in keeping with the spirit of the tampon-tax fund, which was intended to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.

"This money would be much better spent on women's organisations which truly reflect the values of this fund to empower and support women to make decisions about their lives, rather than an organisation that actively promotes restricting women's choices.

"Many excellent women's organisations will have lost funding bids to Life. I am very disappointed that ministers have made this decision in light of the public outcry when this was first put forward."

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service, said: "It is not fitting for what is ultimately a tax on women's bodies to be spent in this way when there are so many other projects supporting women and their choices which have not benefited."

The government announced in March that 70 organisations would share £12m from the tampon-tax fund, which it said would improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.

A longlist said Life would receive £250,000 for "housing, practical help, counselling, emotional support and life-skills training for young pregnant women who are homeless". The sum was among the largest donations on the list.

The tampon tax was the focus of a bitter controversy last year. Changes are expected next year that will remove VAT from sanitary products entirely. The government has already reduced the charge from 20% VAT to 5% but says it cannot go further at present because of EU competition rules.

Life said: "There is no need for 'prohibition' on how the grant is used. We have been very clear with the government in actually specifying that the grant will not be used for counselling or education. As we have stated before, all funds received from the government will be used to support vulnerable women in crisis."

The DCMS said: “As set out in the grant agreement, Life will not be able to use the tampon tax grant to fund its counselling service, or its ‘Life Matters Education Service’ and is prohibited from spending the money on publicity or promotion.

“The grant is for a specific project in west London to support vulnerable, homeless or at-risk pregnant women who ask for their help. All payments will be made in arrears and on receipt of a detailed monitoring report.”

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Mail Online

News

Fury as anti-abortion Life charity is handed £250,000 Government cash from UK 'tampon tax'

LARA KEAY FOR MAILONLINE
679 words
29 October 2017
13:05
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
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* Life are against expanding sex education in primary schools and slam abortion

* Information given at its unregulated pregnancy advice centres are controversial

* It is being given the largest share of the £12m funding from the 'tampon tax'

The Government is giving £250,000's worth of the highly controversial 'tampon tax' to a charity that campaigns against abortion.

UK-based Life charity often speaks passionately against abortion and is opposed to expanding sex education in primary schools.

It has also been at the centre of a controversy about information provided by unregulated pregnancy counselling centres.

But the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has now confirmed it will be giving them a share of the £12million fund raised by the five per cent VAT on tampons and sanitary products - the largest cut given to any organisation.

When the decision was rumoured in the Observer earlier this year, there was mass outrage from politicians and women's groups across the country.

A petition against transferring Life the funds gathered half a million signatures, but ministers insisted the specifics of the grant were yet to be agreed.

The confirmation comes from the response to a Freedom of Information request to DCMS, which reveals a percentage of the £12million pot will be given to Life, but they will be 'prohibited' from spending it on publicity or its controversial pregnancy counselling and education services, reports the Observer.

Diana Johnson, one of a number of Labour MPs who pressed the government to review the funding decision, told the newspaper: 'This decision is not in keeping with the spirit of the tampon tax fund, which was intended to improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.

'This money would be much better spent on women's organisations which truly reflect the values of this fund to empower and support women to make decisions about their lives, rather than an organisation that actively promotes restricting women's choices.

'Many excellent women's organisations will have lost funding bids to Life. I am very disappointed that ministers have made this decision in light of the public outcry when this was first put forward.'

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service added: 'It is not fitting for what is ultimately a tax on women's bodies to be spent in this way when there are so many other projects supporting women and their choices which have not benefited.'

The government announced in March that 70 organisations would share £12million raised by the tampon tax fund, saying it would improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.

A longlist said Life would receive £250,000 for 'housing, practical help, counselling, emotional support and life-skills training for young pregnant women who are homeless'.

The tampon tax was source of mass controversy last year, with many claiming it was a tax on being a woman.

Changes are expected next year that will remove VAT from sanitary products entirely.

The government has already reduced the VAT rate from the original 20 per cent to five per cent, but says it cannot go further at present because of EU competition rules.

Life told the Observer: 'There is no need for 'prohibition' on how the grant is used.

'We have been very clear with the government in actually specifying that the grant will not be used for counselling or education.

'As we have stated before, all funds received from the government will be used to support vulnerable women in crisis.'

The DCMS commented: 'As set out in the grant agreement, Life will not be able to use the tampon tax grant to fund its counselling service, or its 'Life Matters Education Service' and is prohibited from spending the money on publicity or promotion.

'The grant is for a specific project in west London to support vulnerable, homeless or at-risk pregnant women who ask for their help.

'All payments will be made in arrears and on receipt of a detailed monitoring report.'

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theguardian

Voluntary Sector Network
The tampon tax was supposed to fight domestic violence. Where's the money?

Ellie Hutchinson
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14 December 2017
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Government criteria for the £15m fund leaves many charities unable to bid for the cash and demonstrates a wilful ignorance of the sector

When George Osborne announced in 2015 that the £15m raised annually from the sale of menstrual products would be spent directly on charities that help women and girls, many expressed outrage. Fighting gender-based violence should be an issue for society as a whole, led by what victims and survivors need, and supported by the government. It's not a cause for women to champion (and pay for) alone.

But as a manager of a small charity focusing on gender-based violence, any funding stream with this mission is right up my street. Especially at a time when the austerity agenda has devastated us as a sector.

The criteria seemed simple enough – to apply for this fund you must be delivering work in the violence against women and girls field, be innovative, fill gaps and support mental health and wellbeing.

Related: I run a domestic abuse charity, where some staff don't last a week

The Empower Project is a Scottish-based membership organisation established to drive community responses to gender-based violence in digital spaces. We grew out of a need to create spaces for young people to participate in these discussions. We wanted to hear what young people make of sex and relationships in the digital age, and learn how we could support positive sexuality, counteracting abuse and violence. We also wanted to move away from a purely judiciary response to issues around violence, and explore what community justice and prevention looks like. Nine of us work and volunteer on the project; we host discussion groups and deliver training on issues like revenge porn, sex and relationships in the digital age, and online forms of violence.

So. We are innovative. We tackle violence against women and girls. We are doing work not found anywhere else in the country. We also support positive mental health. We should be perfect for the tampon tax fund. Apart from one problem. We need at least £2mturnover to apply.

You read that right. In the 2017/18 guidance for applicants (pdf), the government has specified that applications should be for £1m or more, and that the value of the grant requested should not represent more than 50% of the organisation's annual income. This is in stark contrast to the awards granted to 70 organisations in 2016/17, which ranged from £16,500 to Scottish charity Forth Valley Disability Sport, to £1m to Standing Together Against Domestic Violence. That year, £250,000 was also given to the anti-abortion Life Charity.

The idea that expert organisations doing this work have anywhere near a £2m turnover is laughable. Women's refuges have closed. Staff have been made redundant. Most funding streams barely cover project costs, let alone staff overheads. Our reserves are stretched. Pay has been cut in real terms. We do things for free, all of the time. We volunteer our skills, ideas and labour to keep services going because we know what will happen if we don't.

Related: I work with women facing domestic and sexual violence: it's devastating to see how much progress is unravelling

We suspect this move might be to encourage collaborative working. But there's no one organisation in Scotland with a big enough turnover to act as the lead organisation. It's much the same all over the sector – with a few UK-wide exceptions. Why then, would the government decide to exclude so many charities? This is not a fund for women and girls groups, despite what the guidance says.

This is wilful ignorance of what the sector looks like and what it does. Violence against women and girls' services have always worked at the grassroots level. We listen, learn and support. W e are not a sector filled with large charities. We are a sector of small, community-focused groups, with a few umbrella bodies thrown in to support that work. We do not have anywhere close to £2m.

This was not a fund developed with women and girls in mind. The tampon tax fund is nothing more than a further diversion of scarce resources away from the vital work that we do. Ludicrously, just like menstrual products, ending gender-based violence would appear to be a luxury.

* Ellie Hutchinson is director of the Empower Project.

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Mail Online

News

Fresh push for 'tampon tax' to be scrapped but opponents warn against 'politically correct' exemptions

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* Tanya Plibersek called on the 'tampon tax' to be banished for good Wednesday

* The Deputy Labor leader said it was a 'dumb decision we just have to fix'

* She reignited the debate in Canberra of the eve of International Women's Day

The long-standing debate over the tax imposed on women's sanitary products has been reignited with fresh calls for it to be banned for good.

Deputy Labor leader, Tanya Plibersek, called on the 'tampon tax' to be banished during an address at the National Press Club in Canberra on Wednesday.

On the eve of International Women's Day, she slammed the tax for being a 'dumb decision we just have to fix,' ABC News reported.

'This was a dumb decision when it was made in 1999,' the shadow minister for education and women said.

Her speech referred to women's sanitary items being deemed 'luxury' or 'non-essential' products, therefore warranting a tax.

She drew a comparison between the drug, Viagra - used to treat erectile dysfunction - which was sold tax-free in Australia due to it being regarded essential for men.

'Australia levies GST on tampons but we don't apply it to Viagra,' Ms Plibersek said.

'Only a bunch of blokes sitting around a table would come to the conclusion that sanitary pads are anything other than an essential good.'

She added that in both 2000 and former Liberal treasurer Joe Hockey in 2015 had tried ridding of the 'ridiculous' tampon tax.

Ms Plibersek said while banning the tax would require states' and territories' to sign-off, it was 'something that I just don't think is beyond us'.

Former prime minister Tony Abbott hit back at the renewed calls to ban the controversial tax in a radio interview hours later.

'Look, once you start having these sorts of exemptions, where does it end? Where does it end?,' he told 2GB.

'We have to broaden the tax base, not start carving out politically correct exceptions.'

'My distinguished treasurer (Joe Hockey) was wrong then, and Tanya Plibersek is wrong now.'

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theguardian

Society
Women-only charities lose out in funding from tampon tax

Damien Gayle
487 words
3 May 2018
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Only two in 10 charities awarded government money are specialist women's groups

Only two in 10 charities awarded funding from the government's controversial tampon tax are specialist women's organisations, despite a pledge to dedicate £15m a year raised from the levy to "women's health and support charities".

Rape Crisis and Women's Aid were the only two organisations specifically serving women funded from the annual tampon tax disbursement, receiving just less than £3m between them. Other groups funded included UK Community Foundations, the mental health charity Mind, Brook Young People and two housing associations.

The situation was repeated in the distribution last month of £600,000 to celebrate the centenary year of women's suffrage, when two of the eight organisations funded focussed solely on women's needs.

Vivienne Hayes, the chief executive of the Women's Resource Centre, a national umbrella group for the women's sector, said the government had political reasons for overlooking women's charities. "They know we are the ones that will critique them and hold them to account," she said.

"The general charities don't always have that strong analysis of structural inequalities, so I think it's not surprising that the women's sector has been sidelined and the mainstream organisations that say 'we work with women' have been given the money."

The government promised to use the money raised by the 5% VAT on tampons and sanitary towels to fund the women's sector after activists led a campaign against the levy in 2015. In response to demands for its abolition, George Osborne, then the chancellor, pleaded impotence against EU regulations.

He pledged the government would try to change the rules, and said: "Until that happens, I'm going to use the £15m a year raised from the tampon tax to fund women's health and support charities."

Hayes said the women's sector was starved of resources, on its knees and suffering a "slow drip of a death". Generalist charities offering services that target at women could not replace specialised providers with well-trained and experienced staff.

"We are the experts. Even when the going gets tough, we're still in there doing what we're doing," she said.

UK Community Foundations received £3.4m to fund its Tribewoman project, to help women with "building skills and confidence, improving health and wellbeing, and building social networks". Mind received £1.8m to provide mental health peer support for women, and Brook Young People received £1.5m to address period poverty.

Tracey Crouch, the minister for sport and civil society, said: "The money generated from sanitary products is being invested in good causes that tackle the serious issues that women of all ages face. It will be used to support vulnerable women and girls and help build a Britain fit for the future."

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Mail Online

News

Fury as organisers of the London's Women's March call female politicians including Margaret Thatcher and Barbara Castle 'menstruators' on Twitter in a bid to be inclusive to transgender participants

Amie Gordon For Mailonline
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21 January 2019
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Mail Online
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English
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* Women's March referred to female members of parliament as 'menstruators'

* Sparked a furious backlash online following attempt to 'use inclusive language'

* Provoked fury among followers who slammed 'disgusting and ridiculous' term

The Women's March movement has sparked a furious backlash after referring to female members of parliament as 'menstruators'.

Thousands of demonstrators, including the transgender activist Munro Bergdorf, marched through London on Saturday ahead of the anniversary of Donald Trump's inauguration as President.

But after the event, organisers were met with anger for 'reducing women to "menstruators"' in a discussion about the tampon tax.

Activists came together and marched through the capital on Saturday to the theme 'bread and roses', in honour of American Rose Schneiderman who fronted a rally of the same name in 1912.

Thousands of demonstrators held aloft signs bearing slogans including 'austerity is misogyny', 'women's rights are human rights' and 'Brexit wrecks it' in the rally at the weekend.

Afterwards, Women's March posted a tweet regarding the UK joining the EU in 1973, when Margaret Thatcher and Barbara Castle were among the 23 sitting women MPs.

Women's March tweeted: 'Fun history lesson - when the UK joined the eu it had a limited time to choose which products could remain tax free before everything had to have vat on it. In 1973 there were 23 menstruators in parliament. So really the tampon tax is an issue of political representation.'

But the tweet provoked fury among followers, some of whom vowed to distance themselves from the movement.

One Twitter user wrote: '"Inclusivity" reducing women to "menstruators". Disgusting. Eroding away definition of woman to appease men. I support trans women as trans women, their journey is hard and I won't pretend to know it, as they should understand they won't understand a woman's journey, ridiculous.'

Tamsin added: 'You can't possibly know if these 23 women had the shared experience of menstruation. Many women never menstruate. Surely it is most inclusive to name them as women, which was the only shared experience you can be sure about.'

Nicola Benge tweeted: 'What about women who've gone through the menopause and don't menstruate any more. Are they now completely excluded as non menstruators. Does that make them men?! Sorry cis men!'

Women's March later deleted the tweet before clarifying its position.

It tweeted: 'As a trans inclusive and intersectional group we try to use inclusive language when talking about issues of biology. This guide from #PeriodPositive explains why we chose to use the word 'menstruator' in an earlier tweet about the tampon tax.

'In context what was actually meant was 'people who had likely menstruated at some time in their life' but Twitter has character limits and sometimes accuracy is sacrificed for brevity.

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'Whilst the group of people in question (the 23 afab mps serving in 1973) were all cis women, the word menstruator was used instead of women because the shared experience that was being referenced was menstruation and not womanhood.'

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theguardian

Money
Tampon tax: women's charities urge for cash to be ringfenced

Haroon Siddique
652 words
7 April 2019
20:14
The Guardian
GRDN
English
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Open letter from Women's Resource Centre says current allocation damages 'fragile women's charity sector'

The struggling women's charity sector is suffering further damage as a result of the way funds raised from the tampon tax are being allocated, it has been claimed.

In an open letter to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, more than 100 women, including academics and representatives of women's charities, have urged the government to ringfence cash raised from the unpopular levy to be donated to organisations dedicated to women.

After activists led a campaign against the 5% VAT on tampons and sanitary towels in 2015, the then chancellor, George Osborne, promised to use the revenue "to fund women's health and support charities".

Out of the 10 charities chosen to benefit last year, only two were specialist women's organisations and this year there was only one.

The letter, coordinated by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC), a national umbrella group for the women's sector, says: "We are concerned that even when women's charities have led bids, or applied in consortia-type arrangements, it is larger generic organisations that have been granted the funding .

"We are very concerned that the success of some of these bids will cause further damage to the fragile women's charity sector by drawing investment to generic providers."

The majority of funding has gone to organisations that are not wholly dedicated to women but are running specific projects aimed at their welfare. Beneficiaries have included Mind and Crisis UK.

The sole women's charity to receive tampon tax cash this year was Southall Black Sisters but that did not stop its director, Pragna Patel, putting her name to the letter. Other signatories include Donna Covey, chief executive of AVA (Against Violence and Abuse) and Catherine Donovan, professor of sociology at Durham University.

Vivienne Hayes, chief executive of WRC said: "It seems that the government thinks that large charities are the best option which is actually completely incorrect.

"Research shows that the women who need support services consistently say they want to go to all women's organisations who understand their needs and look like them.

"We do things differently and we do things better but the sector is not getting the money, either from central government or local authorities."

Hayes said the government's stance on the tampon tax was in keeping with policies which have seen women bearing 86% of the burden of austerity, the lack of progress on the gender pay gap, rising levels of domestic and sexual violence, and women's over-representation in low-paid work and as unpaid carers. Last year, the Guardian revealed that council funding for women's refuges had been cut by almost £7m since 2010.

The signatories of the letter claim that the criteria for tampon tax funding restricts the eligibility of smaller women's charities. In 2018 and 2019 there was a requirement for a minimum bid of £1m over two years and for cross-regional partnership bids, they say.

The letter states that women's charities are "often grassroots, locally embedded and relatively small in size compared to larger generic charities that do not have a core focus or specialism in services for women. Due to the fund criteria, there are a very small number of women's charities in a position to bid alone."

It bemoans a “gravely disappointing” failure to support women’s charities.

In 2017, there was controversy when the government awarded £250,000 raised from the Tampon tax to the anti-abortion organisation Life.

Responding to the letter, the DCMS did not address the concerns relating to the women’s charitable sector,

A spokeswoman said: “Every project that receives tampon tax funding must benefit women and girls. Funding is allocated to reach projects across the UK.”

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Mail Online

Femail

Teens reveal shocking verbal abuse they've experienced around their periods – from being called 'dirty' to being branded a 'Femi-Nazi man hater' for discussing the tampon tax

Hayley Richardson For Mailonline

1,201 words
30 May 2019
16:15
Mail Online
DAMONL
English

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* EXCLUSIVE: Maisie, from South Wales, delivered tampon tax speech in Year 10

* Mother worked as a school nurse in deprived area so issue was important to her

* Now 19, she said afterwards was 'running joke' that she was a 'tampon warrior'

* Faced constant stream of comments behind her back, made her feel anxious

* Atlanta, 17, from Manchester, was called 'dirty' by a male classmate at age 13

* Was so embarrassed she went home from school and it 'stuck with her' for a year

Two teenagers have opened up about the shocking verbal abuse they experienced around their periods while growing up.

Atlanta, 17, from Manchester, revealed she was called 'dirty' in front of her friends by a male classmate when she was 13 and was so embarrassed she went home from school.

The boy had overheard her talking to a teacher about her period and she said the mortifying experience 'stuck with her' for a year afterwards.

Meanwhile Maisie, a 19-year-old student from South Wales, said she was branded a 'man hating Femi-Nazi' after delivering a speech to her class about the tampon tax when she was 14 or 15.

The issue is one close to her heart, as her mother worked as a school nurse where some of the pupils came from deprived areas and would often buy extra sanitary products for students in need.

Maisie said she was called a 'tampon warrior' and faced a constant stream of snide comments made behind her back, which made her feel quite anxious.

A recent survey by Plan International UK revealed one in five girls have been teased or bullied around their period, with half of these suffering in silence and not reporting the incidents.

The poll of 1,000 girls aged between 14 and 21 revealed nearly six in 10 have received negative comments, and 66 per cent reported missing a part or full day of school as a result.

Atlanta said whenever she and her friends discussed menstruation at school, boys would tell them to 'be quiet'.

She recalled an incident in a lesson when a boy who had heard her talking to her teacher about her period, which she had only recently started, loudly refused to sit next to her.

'He got up and started calling me dirty and stuff, and after that I went home early,' Atlanta said.

'It was really embarrassing, it was really awkward as well because everyone knew at that point, and everyone looked at me weirdly.'

Afterwards Atlanta kept it to herself, too 'embarrassed and ashamed' to discuss it with her friends or family, while the boy's friends would continue to 'whisper' comments whenever she walked past them.

'It stuck with me throughout that year, Year 8, because I was new to the period thing, but as I got older and learnt more about it I found it easier to brush it off,' she said.

'You know the saying, "boys will be boys", and I feel the reaction was one of those moments. There's an expectation that boys don't know about that sort of thing, so I don't think it was taken as seriously as it should have been. I was just told to ignore him.'

Maisie decided to give a presentation on the tampon tax as part of her GCSE English coursework because it angered her that the products are viewed for VAT purposes as a 'luxury' item.

But afterwards she said one person called her a 'Femi-Nazi', which she described as 'horrific' given it came from one of her peers.

'The tampon tax was an issue in my community; girls were coming to school and didn't have access to these sort of products, so Mum would buy extra supplies when we went to the supermarket,' she explained.

'I remember giving the speech and many of the boys were uncomfortable with the topic; you'd look around and they'd all be looking at the floor, not engaging with it and sniggering.

'It made me feel uncomfortable because it's an issue that affected half the people in my class, and they thought it was acceptable to make jokes about it and not take it seriously.

'Afterwards it was a running joke that I was some kind of tampon warrior - they'd call me a Femi-Nazi, and I got a lot of stick for it.

An issue that is damaging girls' self-esteem...

Tanya Barron, chief executive at Plan International UK, said: 'Girls across the UK are facing unacceptable stigma and shame linked to their periods, and this survey shows that, too often, this takes the form of verbal abuse and bullying.

'Not only is this damaging girls' confidence and self-esteem, it's also having an often-overlooked impact on their education. Girls tell us they are missing out on school because of their period and struggling to catch up on schoolwork as a result. We can't allow this to continue.

'If girls around the world – including here in the UK – are to reach their full potential then we must put an end to the stigma and taboo around periods, and the best way to do that is through education and open conversations that normalise periods and put an end to the silence.'

'I did feel a bit anxious and I definitely felt I became more aware of how I presented myself and if I brought up certain topics related to feminism or gender equality.'

Maisie said she experienced a lot of comments made behind her back which she said 'changed the way some people in my class viewed me'.

Both girls didn't feel they could report the incidents, and said better education is needed to help address the stigma around periods. They believe not segregating boys and girls during PSHE lessons is key to achieving this.

'I think we should be teaching about periods from a younger age, because I had my first lesson when I was in Year 6, my final year of primary school, again separated from the boys, and we never touched upon it again until Year 8 or 9, and by that point a lot of people had started their periods,' Maisie pointed out.

'We only learnt about it in school as something that was biological, so the 28-day cycle, with scientific diagrams, but we'd never learn about the emotional aspects of periods, like premenstrual syndrome, or the different ages you can actually start them.

'Everyone needs to learn about them because even if it doesn't affect you directly, whether it's your mum, sister or future girlfriend, you're going to have to deal with it.'

Atlanta added: 'Boys don't know about periods, so education should be better, and boys should not be segregated from girls when talking about periods.

'Half the population go through it, we're taught about testosterone in biology, but in terms of talking about periods, that's almost hidden away from boys.'

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theguardian

Society
Broken promises over tampon tax

Letters
276 words
25 June 2019
18:40
The Guardian
GRDN
7
English
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We are building a campaign to get at least £500m of this ringfenced for women's specialist charities, says Vivienne Hayes

We were pleased to see coverage of the ingenuity of some German women to highlight the ongoing issue of taxing period products, which are a necessity, not a luxury for women and girls (Report, 22 June). Here in the UK, books and tampons are also joining forces. Ranjit Kaur, author of the recently published The Dancing Maharani and Other Stories, is supporting our tampon tax campaign by donating a share of the profits from the book to the campaign. As your article rightly notes, we at WRC have expressed our dismay that the then chancellor's promise – to fund women's health and support charities with monies raised from this tax – has been broken. We estimate that the debt of the tampon tax is well over £700m and we are building a campaign to get at least £500m of this ringfenced for women's specialist charities, and hold the government to account on its promise. In its media campaign, the Inland Revenue claims that "tax shouldn't be taxing". Equally, tampons shouldn't be taxed. However, they are and that money should go to women's charities. Period.

Vivienne Hayes

CEO, Women's Resource Centre

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guardian.letters@theguardian.com

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to upload it and we'll publish the best submissions in the letters spread of our print edition

Document GRDN000020190625ef6p002bl

News
Johnson sticks to pledge on tampon tax as unionists are left out in cold

By Hugo Gye DEPUTY POLITICAL EDITOR
524 words
18 October 2019
i
IIND
1ST
10
English
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News | NEGOTIATIONS

It was the tampon tax that - nearly - lost it.

Long through the night on Wednesday, and even into yesterday morning, British and European negotiators argued over the final obstacle to getting a Brexit deal.

The key issue was VAT, a small piece of the Brexit jigsaw but ultimately an area where Boris Johnson refused to budge.

Under the proposed rules governing Northern Ireland's relationship with the EU and UK, the region would have to apply European laws on VAT even if Great Britain adopted a new regime.

Crucially, that means the Tory pledge to abolish VAT on tampons and other sanitary products after Brexit would not apply to Northern Ireland.

The UK sought an opt-out, but the EU was reluctant to bend its rules. Mr Johnson instructed his negotiators to hold firm, mindful that scrapping the tampon tax was one of the key pledges of the Vote Leave campaign he ran in 2016.

"It was totemic to the referendum campaign," one of his closest advisers told i. "The Prime Minister told the whole team, 'We have to sort the tampon tax.'" Eventually the EU agreed, meaning that the tampons are likely to go VAT-free at the earliest possible opportunity. The row continued until 9am yesterday, minutes before Mr Johnson spoke to Jean-Claude Juncker to seal the deal.

It was the final chapter of a tortuous process which culminated in a week of late nights in Brussels as civil servants hammered out the new Withdrawal Agreement. But just as important as talks in Brussels were the parallel talks taking place in Westminster, where the Prime Minister's officials, led by his closest aide Dominic Cummings, were desperate to win over the DUP. The "entire negotiating team" was focused on keeping the unionists on board, according to one source.

In an early morning statement, the Northern Irish party made it clear they were not ready to sign on to Mr Johnson's deal. But the Prime Minister decided to push ahead anyway.

No 10 admits that it had to shift its red lines on Northern Ireland. "It will be a situation where there is a degree of alignment on a whole number of areas," a senior official said.

"There's an argument that it's an arrangement that is atypical in most societies in the world."

But they also believe they have made the EU move, above all on the question of whether or not Northern Ireland stays in the UK's customs territory.

"That was a very big step by the EU and particularly by the Taoiseach [Leo Varadkar]," the official insisted.

Abandoning the DUP could prove a huge gamble for Mr Johnson. His decision to fly home last night rather than stay in Brussels was in part an acknowledgement that he must now mount a massive lobbying operation aimed at hardline Brexiteers in his own party and pro-Leave MPs from the Labour side.

Even after the 11th-hour victory in Brussels, the clock is still ticking.

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The Daily Telegraph

News

Tampon tax was sticking point

JAMES CRISP

132 words
18 October 2019
The Daily Telegraph
DT
1; National
9
English

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THE path to the Brexit deal was cleared after negotiators sealed an agreement on the "Tampon Tax", allowing women in Northern Ireland to benefit from a zero per cent UK VAT rate on the sanitary products after Brexit.

Michel Barnier told EU27 ambassadors that VAT was the main issue holding up an agreement. But the EU's chief negotiator did not reveal the role of the Tampon Tax, which, thanks to EU law, forces British women to pay a 5 per cent VAT rate on sanitary products. Sources confirmed the tampon issue had delayed talks but had now been resolved. The Government has long planned to cut the tax to a VAT rate of zero but was prevented by Brussels rules from doing so.

Document DT00000020191018efai0003l

theguardian

Politics

General election: Johnson appeals to Labour leavers with plan for more state aid for jobs after Brexit – as it happened

Andrew Sparrow (now): Jedidajah Otte and Kate Lyons (earlier)

14,118 words
29 November 2019
19:47
The Guardian
GRDN
English

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Prime minister announces plans to implement a 'buy British' policy for government procurement when the UK leaves the EUJohnson dodges LBC radio host's questions about his childrenBoris Johnson's press conference - SummaryAfternoon summarySign up for Andrew Sparrow's daily election briefing

block-time published-time 6.12pm GMT

Afternoon summary

* Boris Johnson has announced plans to extend the use of job-projecting state aid and to implement a 'buy British' policy for government procurement when the UK leaves the EU. He announced both policies, which seemed intended to appeal in particular to Labour-leaning leave voters, in a rare press conference where he appeared alongside his colleagues from the Vote Leave campaign, Michael Gove and Gisela Stuart. In the past it has mostly been Labour Brexiters who have complained about EU state aid rules limiting the ability of the government to use subsidies to help struggling companies, while the Conservatives have been wary of policies that meddle with market economics. But at the news conference Johnson claimed that change was necessary because "the ramifications of EU state aid rules are felt everywhere". The Institute of Directors, a free-market business organisation, and the Institute of Economic Affairs, a libertarian thinktank, both strongly criticised the new Tory approach, with the IoD describing this as "like a bad solution in search of the wrong problem". But the small print of the Conservative announcement suggests that Johnson is planning relatively modest changes to the current regime, rather than a wholesale shift towards 1970s socialism, and it has also been pointed out that any attempt to diverge very far from current EU-style rules would make negotiating a UK-EU free trade deal much harder. At his press conference Johnson also insisted that the Conservatives were the change option at the election, because no other party would take advantages of the opportunities for reform offered by Brexit. There is a full summary of the press conference here.

* Johnson has praised the police and members of the public who intervened to tackle a terrorist suspect on London Bridge. The man was shot dead by police. My colleague Matthew Weaver is covering the latest developments on a separate live blog.

* Johnson has refused to disclose how many children he has or whether he is involved in their lives. He was speaking in an LBC phone-in during which he was strongly criticised over past comments about single mothers.

* Johnson has claimed that the government has several trade deals "oven-ready" for when the UK leaves the EU. On the LBC phone-in, he was asked how many trade deals with other countries were in place. The UK is not allowed to formally start trade talks with other countries until after it has left the EU, but it wants to have them ready for when the post-Brexit transition period ends, at the end of 2020 according to current plans. Asked how many trade deals had actually been agreed, Johnson replied:

There are a number that are oven-ready... There are a number that are virtually ready to go.

Johnson also repeated his claim that the UK would be able to agree a trade deal with the EU by the end of next year. Sir Ivan Rogers, the former UK ambassador to the EU, is one of many experts who have said Johnson is not being honest about the difficulties he will face.

* Former Labour MP and chair of the Vote Leave campaign Gisela Stuart has urged longtime Labour voters to "set party allegiance aside to get Brexit done" and support Boris Johnson on 12 December.

* The BBC has refused to allow Boris Johnson to appear on the Andrew Marr Show this weekend unless he agrees to take part in a one-on-one interview with Andrew Neil, amid ongoing tension between the Conservatives and broadcasters.

* The BBC is being “played” by Boris Johnson and should be angry about his foot-dragging on whether he will agree to an interview with Andrew Neil, Labour’s John McDonnell has said.

* School leaders and teaching unions have reacted with dismay to the Conservative party’s plans for longer and more disruptive Ofsted inspections, with one warning the changes would “do more harm than good” if implemented.

* Stanley Johnson, the prime minister’s father, has been criticised for suggesting most people are not literate enough to spell Pinocchio. He made the comment in a BBC interview where he was defending his son over accusations of lying.

That’s all from us for tonight. Because of the London Bridge attack, I’m afraid we won’t be able to keep the blog going to cover the seven-party BBC debate at 7pm tonight. But there will, of course, by news coverage here, on the Guardian’s website.

enltrHere is the line-up for The BBC Election Debate on Friday #GE2019pic.twitter.com/Pr1KnVbDlf

— BBC News Press Team (@BBCNewsPR) November 27, 2019

Thanks for the comments.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 6.18pm GMT

block-time published-time 5.27pm GMT

Here is my colleague Marina Hyde ’s take on what has happened in the election campaign this week.

Related: In this climate, how does Boris Johnson not melt with shame? | Marina Hyde

And here is an extract.

And so to the morning after the night before, when a Channel 4 floor manager is still applying Kleenex to the prime ministerial puddle, and hopefully making his refusal to mop up Nigel Farage a union matter. Where are our dramatis personae? On LBC a single mother has read Johnson’s recently unearthed 1995 Spectator column, in which he tips all over single mothers. What a quaint period piece, from a time when all you ever heard about was single mothers, and not the deadbeat dads that left them to it. The single mother’s voice is wobbling while she asks how he can talk about her family like that when he won’t even talk about his own. Presenter Nick Ferrari asks Johnson how many children he has and whether he plays a full and proper role in all their lives. The prime minister twice refuses to answer.

Meanwhile, whither Stanley Johnson, the father that public life really needs to be abandoned by? By Friday morning, this desperate ligger had already bagged several media appearances out of his son’s C4 no-show. But I imagine Stanley will now have been spirited to the oubliette in which Jacob Rees-Mogg is being kept, after his appearance on Victoria Derbyshire’s BBC programme. Here, Johnson Snr’s reaction to being told that one viewer had called his son Pinocchio was: “that requires a degree of literacy which I think the great British public doesn’t necessarily have. They couldn’t spell Pinocchio if they tried.” A line somehow redolent of that deathless Donald Trump quote: “I love the poorly educated.”

block-time published-time 5.01pm GMT

Ivan Rogers on Boris Johnson's argument that UK-EU trade deal will be easy to negotiate

In his Q&A earlier Boris Johnson said that he was confident of being about to negotiate a trade deal with the EU before the end of next year, particularly because a “state of grace” applied, with the two sides currently in “complete alignment so far as our regulations go”. (See 2.47pm.)

Sir Ivan Rogers would not agree. Rogers, who has been one of the fiercest and most perceptive critics of government Brexit policy since he resigned as UK ambassador to the EU in January 2017, addressed this very point in a lecture he gave at Glasgow University on Monday. Here is an excerpt.

The further “out” of the European Union we choose to go, and therefore the further we want to go, the longer it will take to negotiate the necessary agreements.

This is the first critical point which government ministers either repeatedly continue to get wrong, or choose to mislead the British public about, when talking in these weeks about “getting Brexit done”.

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The fact of “being aligned on day one after exit” does not make the negotiation of a trade deal easier.

The current alignment of UK and EU rules – what PM Johnson now refers to as the “state of grace” is wholly irrelevant: the only relevant question is where you aim to be on day two, day 200 and day 2000...

Under [a Norway-type] agreement, you would maintain a lot of your former rights. But that’s because you would submit to a lot of your former obligations. And these obligations are very significant.

But if you want much greater divergence from your erstwhile model inside the trade bloc you are exiting, it is precisely because you do not intend to meet those obligations any more.

Fair enough. But, by definition, you must then start the negotiation “bottom up” not “top down”.

And the question then becomes, for every sector of the economy, how far, if at all, beyond the baseline of commitments they make into the WTO, are both negotiating parties willing to commit.

And, by definition, this will be much more difficult, not less.

Because the questions then are how much scope for future divergence does the UK want in each area, and how much latitude the EU is prepared to negotiate.

The EU side also has to calibrate the consequential loss of access to its market which the desired UK degree of divergence might cost. Even coming to an unanimous agreement inside the 27 on the right answers will not be short or straightforward.

block-time published-time 4.28pm GMT

As my colleague Martin Belam reports, Stanley Johnson, the prime minister’s father, told the BBC earlier that he thought most people were not literate enough to spell Pinocchio. He was responding to criticism of his son’s own Pinocchio tendencies.

Related: Boris Johnson's father says UK public 'couldn't spell Pinocchio'

block-time published-time 4.20pm GMT

In the comments LostinBruges has asked for examples of the EU state aid rules that Boris Johnson believes prevent the UK government intervening to help a British company.

LostinBruges29 November 2019 2:38pm

@ Andrew Sparrow

Bit confused here. Maybe you can help. Which EU state aid rules would currently stop the UK from helping an important UK company? A few years ago STX the french ship builder was temporarily nationalised to save jobs and put it back on its feet, it was then sold to an italian company with the French state keeping a 33% share. All this was done under EU rules.

So when Mr Johnson is talking about EU rules stopping this and Journalists like Mr Islam are backing him up on twitter posts, which EU state aid laws are they refering too?

This is what the Conservative party says on this subject in the briefing note to sent out to journalists explaining the new policy.

EU state aid law imposes a number of restrictions on the support that the UK can provide to industry. The treaties in principle prohibit ‘any aid granted by a member state or through state resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings’, which might have an affect on trade between member states (TFEU, art. 107(1). Aids must be approved by the EU institutions to be lawful (TFEU, art. 108).

This law is notoriously vague. It means the UK government may have to wait months or years for a decision by the European commission. The state aid rules have a chilling effect on government support for industry. An example of this will suffice: the government decided, in response to the steel crisis four years ago, that it would provide aid to certain firms. On 28 October 2015 it was announced that energy intensive industries ‘will be exempt from the policy costs of the renewable obligation and feed-in tariffs, to ensure that they have long-term certainty and remain competitive’ (Sajid Javid, Update on UK steel industry : written statement - HCWS410, 17 December 2015). As a result of EU state aid rules, however, the government was prohibited from implementing its policy until approval was given by the European commission. The commission notified the government of its approval on 17 December 2015 (Sajid Javid, Update on UK steel industry : written statement - HCWS410, 17 December 2015). There was therefore a 50 day lag between the government

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applying for approval and European Commission giving it. According to the manufacturers' organisation, the EEF, 'the [aid] package is worth approximately £45m per annum to the steel sector. In total it is worth approximately £300m a year to the Energy Intensive sector' (EEF, 17 December 2015). On this basis, it can be calculated that the 50 day delay as a result of the EU's state aid rules cost the steel industry £6.2m and energy intensive industries as a whole £41.1m.

What is striking about this example is that it suggests Johnson wants a new framework that would give the government a bit more flexibility over state aid - not the opportunity for intervention on a much grander scale than anything allowed now.

block-time published-time 3.38pm GMT

From my colleague Heather Stewart.

enltrDowning Street: the PM is on his way back to No10 from his constituency where he will receive further updates on the London Bridge incident.

— Heather Stewart (@GuardianHeather) November 29, 2019

My colleague Matthew Weaver is covering the London Bridge incident on a separate live blog.

Related: London Bridge incident 'treated as if terror-related' after five people injured – live news

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.14pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.32pm GMT

Hugo Dixon from the anti-Brexit website InFacts says Boris Johnson was wrong to claim in his press conference earlier that the UK needs to leave the EU to abolish the tampon tax. (See 11.35am.)

enltrCutting tampon tax was the 2nd reason Johnson gave for Brexit at his press conference. But we don't need to leave the EU to scrap it. Is Johnson really so ignorant that he thinks tampon tax is a good reason for Brexit? Or is he lying? https://t.co/vA0xZZ6FX7

— Hugo Dixon (@Hugodixon) November 29, 2019

block-time published-time 3.21pm GMT

IoD criticises new Tory post-Brexit state aid policy as 'bad solution in search of wrong problem'

The Institute of Directors, the free market business organisation, has issued a very critical statement about the "buy British"/state aid policies announced by Boris Johnson earlier. (See 12.45pm.) This is from Allie Renison, the IoD's head of Europe and trade policy.

While we need more clarity around the detail, the proposals outlined do not fit easily with ambitions for a 'Global Britain'. Indeed they suggest a retreat away from free and open markets, with clear implications for a comprehensive new trade relationship with the EU. This is not the kind of divergence we should be seeking in the first instance. It seems like a bad solution in search of the wrong problem.

Even aside from the trading implications of these policies, there are concerns for the very small and medium-sized businesses they claim to be prioritising. Propping up failing enterprises and obliging public bodies to 'buy British' could end up unfairly protecting and subsidising large incumbents at the expense of true competition and new entrants to the market. Locality simply cannot be the main determinant here, as there are rightly multiple criteria to ensure wider value for money.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 4.17pm GMT

block-time published-time 3.20pm GMT

The Scotttish Lib Dem leader Willie Rennie throwing a copy of the Scottish Lib Dem manifesto at Murrayfield Curling Rink, Edinburgh. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PA

block-time published-time 3.18pm GMT

On an icy afternoon in Ruchill, north Glasgow, Labour candidate Pam Duncan-Glancy is explaining the particular travails of canvassing a constituency that is 80% tenements from a wheelchair. She's aided by a stalwart and well-wrapped team of activists, but also notes how many people are willing to come down their stairs to speak to her in person: the mark of a wider culture change she hopes.

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One of the stories of the campaign so far for Duncan-Glancy has been undecideds - according to YouGov, 17% of 2017 Labour voters say they are unsure how they'll vote this time around which is crucial in this key marginal, where the SNP's Patrick Grady won by a majority of 1,000 two years ago.

Undecideds fall into two camps, she says: those who previously voted for the SNP but have concerns about education, the NHS and other services run by the SNP government from Holyrood; and those who are disgusted by the behaviour of the Tories, Boris Johnson's "humbug" insult, Jacob Rees-Mogg reclining on the Commons benches and so forth. This is the "scunnered" crew, and the challenge is to persuade them to vote at all on 12 December.

block-time published-time 2.47pm GMT

Boris Johnson's press conference - Summary

Here are the main points from the Boris Johnson press conference.

* Boris Johnson claimed that the government would be able to adopt a new approach to state aid after Brexit without "distorting competition". In response to a question about whether his new policy (see 12.45pm) meant he would be running a more interventionist government, he replied:

I'm not in favour of distorting competition, I don't want to see unfair practices introduced, I want to see a level playing field. But when I look sometimes at what EU rules have meant for UK companies, and I saw examples the other day up in Teesside of how fantastic British business was finding it very difficult to develop our potential in wind turbine technology because of EU rules. There will be ways in which we can do things differently and better.

Johnson also claimed state aid rules prevented councils or schools from charging for bus services for pupils, or for the disabled.

On state aid, the ramifications of EU state aid rules are felt everywhere. I [have] talked to companies, local government or schools that are trying, for instance, to run bus services where they take in some contribution from the passengers. What they find is that they fall foul of state aid rules in so far as they may be deemed, therefore, to be competing with private hire vehicles or private bus companies of one kind or another. So that buses taking kids to school, or helping to move disadvantaged people around the community, are facing real difficulties because of some EU state aid rules.

What we will be able to do is be more flexible, be more pragmatic, but also maintain a level playing field.

But, when Johnson was asked if he could give an example of a company that had gone bust in the last decade that might have been saved by the sort of policies that Johnson plans to adopt post-Brexit, he declined to give an example. He also dismissed suggestions that this new policy might make it harder for the UK to negotiate a trade deal with the EU next year. (See 11.48am.)

* He said he was "very confident" of being able to get a trade deal with the EU before the end of next year. Agreeing the deal before the end of 2020 is essential if Johnson wants to avoid extending the Brexit transition. (The Tory manifesto rules out an extension). Explaining why he was confident, Johnson said:

And, the advantage that we have in doing that deal, is that we are in a state of grace with the EU at the moment, in the sense that we have complete alignment so far as our regulations go. We have zero-tariff, zero-quota arrangements already. There has never been a negotiation between trading partners that began with the two sides already in that state of harmony. So I'm full of optimism and confidence.

* He said he had "no intention" of raising fuel duty in the next parliament. Asked if he would rule out an increase, he said:

We don't want to raise fuel duty. I have absolutely no intention to raise fuel duty.

This is not the same as firmly ruling out an increase in fuel duty.

* He said a vote for the Conservatives was a vote for change. He said:

No other party can deliver change at this election because every other party would be stuck in that selfsame hung, broken parliament, arguing amongst themselves about Brexit, which is why the only way to secure change at this election is with the Conservative party.

In his speech at the start of the event Michael Gove, the Cabinet Office minister, delivered the same message. He said the vote to leave the EU in 2016 was a vote for change. He said:

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A vote for any party other than the Conservatives is, in effect, a vote for another hung parliament, a vote for more dither and delay, a vote for a Corbyn-Sturgeon alliance, a vote for two more referendums next year.

Put simply, a vote for any party other than the Conservatives is a vote against change.

This is important because, in a general election, there are really only three overall narratives you can offer voters - it's time for a change, more of the same, or don't let the other lot ruin things - and, all other considerations being equal, the 'time for a change' message is always the strongest.

* Johnson rejected claims that he was "running scared" of doing an interview with Andrew Neil - although he refused to say that he confirm that he would agree to participate.

* Johnson claimed that, when he said in the ITV debate last week that he thought the monarchy was "beyond reproach", he was talking about the Queen - not the royal family in general. He said:

On the monarchy, the monarchy is the Queen. That in my view, she is beyond reproach. There is a distinction between the monarchy and the royal family and everybody will readily appreciate that. It is an obvious definitional distinction.

* He dismissed claims that he was someone who told lies. Asked about this, he said:

I do not set out to mislead the electorate in my policies, in what I set out to achieve. If you look at my record over the last 10 years when I've set out to do something I've gone at it with as much energy and determination and work as I can.

* Gisela Stuart, the former Labour MP who campaigned alongside Johnson and Gove in Vote Leave, said she was urging leave supporters to vote Tory in this election to get Brexit done. She said:

In this election I will not vote for Jeremy Corbyn but I can vote for Brexit.

This is, after all, the Brexit election.

And a vote for Boris Johnson this time around is a vote to get Brexit done.

To do so does not make me and would not make you a Tory.

Rather, it is the best option for all those who like me still share Labour's traditional values but who voted to leave and who want certainty and an end to the stagnation, division and delay.

* She said that Labour's version of Brexit would effectively amount to remain. (See 11.45am.)

Boris Johnson speaking at a press conference alongside Michael Gove (left) and Gisela Stuart. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

block-time published-time 1.48pm GMT

Faisal Islam, the BBC's economics editor, says that if Boris Johnson really does want a tariff-free, quota-free trade deal with the EU before the end of next year, then he may have to abandon the "buy British"/state aid plans announced today. (See 12.45am.)

enltr"We will back British businesses by introducing a new state aid regime which makes it faster & easier for Govt to intervene" say Conservatives post-Brexit.

V. interesting - interventionist, poss consequences for UK-EU trade deal

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

enltrPM's new deal/PD commits to: "uphold common high standards applicable in Union and UK at end of transition period in area of state aid" and maintain a robust/comprehensive framework for competition & state aid control that prevents undue distortion of trade and competition"

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

PD is the political declaration.

enltrThe PM's renegotiation, ie dumping of backstop and replacement with NI frontstop, definitely weakened the state aid commitments in original Brexit deal - eg no longer application of EU law on state aid by independent authority, Joint Committee, and EC in UK courts...

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

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enltrso PM can offer more to the Labour leave voters this is targeted at, as a result of his changes to the deal,

However, if he wants the tariff/quota free trade deal with EU, within a year, that he is also promising, the room for manoeuvre here is rather limited...

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

enltrIndeed industry figure who has met all sides & understands this stuff tells me "it wouldn't last one meeting with Barnier. Pure electioneering. Otherwise will be tariffs on GB goods entering single market".

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

enltrso depends on exactly what are the extra state aid powers. But in election terms, PM can say he wants to do more to change state aid than Corbyn, who if he wants a deal in 3 months, there wont be an intricate state aid negotiation, so with that or Remain, state aid remains same.

— Faisal Islam (@faisalislam) November 29, 2019

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 2.24pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.31pm GMT

Thanks for all your questions

Our political team will answer more of your questions about the election on Monday at 12.30pm.

block-time published-time 1.28pm GMT

Boris Johnson at his press conference this morning. Photograph: Peter Nicholls/Reuters

block-time published-time 1.23pm GMT

Rightwing thinktank IEA says new Tory Brexit policies show 'little understanding of benefits of free trade'

The Institute of Economic Affairs, a rightwing, free market thinktank, has strongly criticised the Conservative “buy British”/state aid proposals announced this morning. (See 12.45am.)

This is what the IEA’s Victoria Hewson said about state aid.

Current state aid rules already stifle our economy, by allowing government interventions – in special circumstances – to give support to struggling industry. Extending these rules, by allowing government to use taxpayers’ money to prop up industries that have no future, would be to move swiftly in the wrong direction, crippling the emergence of new and innovative businesses that our economy relies on.

Calls to expand state aid translate to veiled support for cronyism. Interventionist and protectionist policies always end up disadvantaging smaller businesses in favour of a few giants.

And this is what the IEA’s Julian Jessop said about “buy British”.

A ‘Buy British’ policy is pure protectionism, and it comes with heavy costs.

The Conservatives are showing little understanding of the benefits of free trade, let alone the benefits of Brexit. A ‘buy British’ policy would make it harder for the public sector to access the best products at the best price, wherever they happen to be made. As a result, consumers or taxpayers will pay more for a lower quality service. Everyone will suffer if there is less choice and less competition.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.47pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.22pm GMT

Q: What causes the excessive error in the forecasts of election results?

1. Sampling/computing errors?

2. Methodological errors (wrong assumptions in choosing samples)?

3. People not truly decided until the moment they mark the ballot paper?

4. People saying a plain lie about how they are going to vote?

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Have the four points above been quantified, in order to compute the correct tolerance error? Or is the tolerance error itself being subject to a wild and unquantifiable error? Anthony, Maidstone

Pollsters say their results are right to within three percentage points – on either side – 95% percent of the time. That means if the Conservatives are polling at 40% then the actual proportion of Tory support will be somewhere between 37% and 43% 19 times out of 20. When you think about it, this leaves a lot of get out.

Sampling errors have caused problems in the past when, despite their best efforts, pollsters have not generated a model properly representative of the British population – 2015 being one of the best examples. But estimating turnout by demographic groups is probably harder still.

Lying is not considered an issue so much, but people do not always say what they are going to do, or remember correctly how they voted last time (the latter creates an issue for generating representative samples). More important are genuine, last-minute changes of opinion. There was a big movement to Labour in the final stages of 2017, and because polls work back a couple of days, it was not properly picked up.

Q: How do the results of previous election-period opinion polls from the major agencies compare with what actually happened? It strikes me that the answer to this question, on an agency-by-agency basis, might give a hint towards showing any institutional bias within the pollsters' organisations. Stephen, retired lecturer, Bexhill

Pollsters have made a variety of mistakes, although in their defence a movement of one or two percentage points can have a real impact on the final result.

In 2017, the Conservative vote share was overestimated and the Labour vote share underestimated by most pollsters, and rolling averages reflected this. Some final polls predicted a Tory lead of 13 points, when in fact the gap to Labour was 2.35 points. The 14-day rolling average predicted an eight-point lead. But Survation, for example, predicted a one-point gap.

Is there an anti-Labour bias then? The reverse happened in 2015. Poll trackers had David Cameron's Conservatives one point ahead going into the election. But the Tories won by 7.5 points in the end. So it is hard to see any long term institutional bias.

In my view, it is best to focus on the polls taken in the last three-four days before an election, and ignore 14-day rolling averages – and look for any evolution in the trend. The late move is the one that counts.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.51pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.16pm GMT

Max Wakefield, the director of campaigns at the climate charity Possible – which kickstarted the campaign for there to be a climate debate – has described Michael Gove's appearance at the Channel 4 studios last night as political theatre.

Wakefield said he approached the Conservatives a number of times asking them to take part in the debate and that, on the occasions they replied to his emails, the party made it clear they would not take part. One Tory response, which Wakefield tweeted, said they would not be attending because they thought environmental issues "should be in the policy mainstream – they cut across everything we do and as such should not be cut off in a separate silo".

enltrl started this campaign for the world's first election #climatedebate over three weeks ago by emailing multiple parties for their participation. Was told clearly by No10 that the issues "are too important to be siloed off into their own debate''. Here is the email response to me pic.twitter.com/wiWMosZqdm

— Max Wakefield (@wakmax) November 29, 2019

"It was a dead cat," said Wakefield of Gove's appearance, referring to the political communications strategy of creating a dramatic distraction from a topic that is causing a party damage.

[The Conservatives] rang Channel 4 at about 5pm on the day before the debate trying to persuade them to take Gove, so they were obviously recognising that it was causing them some damage [to be seen to be ducking the debate] … That didn't work.

They clearly decided to pivot to trying to divert as much attention as possible and generate a story, which was a distraction from the narrative at hand.

They sought to build a narrative in which they were the victims being taken down by a conspiracy between a leftwing opposition leader and a leftwing broadcaster. It's depressing enough that they didn't want to do the

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debate and so shameful, frankly, that they actually sought to undermine it happening at all. It was political theatre.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.52pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.14pm GMT

Just over 15 minutes left to ask any questions you may have on opinion polls. Send them in to us here.

Q: What efforts have been made to improve the polling companies' methods since the last election and referendum. I'm reminded of conversations around "herding" of pollsters towards the end of each vote. Will Grey, 27, IT professional, Leeds

Some aspects of polling methodology are uncontroversial – the companies are good at weighting their samples so they are in line with the demographics of the population. They also tend to ask a standard question, usually: "In the general election to be held on 12 December, which party will you vote for?"

But other factors are hard to control for. Pollsters like to include an accurate sample of how people voted in the last election, except people don't always remember who that was (this "false recall" may have the effect of artificially boosting Labour's vote, read more on that here).

Pollsters also struggle with predicting turnout via various demographic groups, which has contributed to errors in the past. And finally, some pollsters find ways of making adjustments that reflect little more than "gut feel". ICM, for example, used to make adjustments to allow for "shy Tories" – people who intended to vote Conservative but would not say how they had voted.

At this election, some companies, such as YouGov, are producing Conservative leads of 13 points. But others, such as ICM, are producing seven-point leads. Why the discrepancy? Their samples are constructed differently. If the figures start to bunch up in the final days, people will rightly ask if herding is going on.

Q: What is push-polling, and what does the law say about it? How do I identify whether a telephone call I might get is canvassing/push-polling rather than "market research" or legitimate polling that is independent of political parties? Mandy, Shropshire

Push-polling is where people are asked a highly restricted set of questions to produce a desired answer. It is not illegal but it can be highly misleading – much like a bar chart on a Lib Dem leaflet. Anybody being approached by some purporting to conduct a poll should ask them which firm they work for, who is paying for the poll, and study the questions keenly to check they are open-ended and not forcing respondents into a simple conclusion.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.57pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.13pm GMT

Boris Johnson and Michael Gove (right) at the press conference. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

block-time published-time 1.10pm GMT

Here is Jonathan Portes, economics professor at Kings College London and a government economist, on the Conservative party's state aid/procurement announcement.

enltrBring back Imperial Preference!

Who (apart from anyone with an elementary grasp of history/political economy) would have thought that Brexit would lead the Conservative Party to adopt its most protectionist manifesto for a century? https://t.co/DfGhXcW1iK

— Jonathan Portes (@jdportes) November 29, 2019

block-time published-time 1.08pm GMT

Neil Hanvey, who was sacked as the Scottish National party's candidate for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath yesterday after admitting posting anti-semitic social media content, has confirmed he is still on the ballot for the election.

Hours after posting a statement on Twitter offering an unequivocal apology for his "dreadful errors of judgement", he posted a statement on his campaign Facebook page late on Thursday night to say he was still standing for election. He said:

I can confirm I will still be standing for the Kirkcaldy & Cowdenbeath constituency as a candidate! My policy commitments remain & I am unequivocally dedicated to the constituency and constituents. Please keep a look out for further content over the coming days.

Hanvey insisted on Thursday he did not realise the posts were antisemitic or offensive. After saying earlier he fully supported the SNP's decision to suspend him, he liked Twitter messages calling the SNP's decision "ridiculous" and told one of his followers: "I'm still a candidate Emma, you can still vote for me… pass it on…"

Until his dismissal as the SNP's candidate, Hanvey was clear favourite to defeat Lesley Laird, the Labour party's shadow Scottish secretary, who had won back the seat from the SNP in 2017 with a very narrow 259-vote majority. The deadline for nominations was on November 14, so the SNP is unable to field an alternative candidate.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 1.04pm GMT

Q: My question is about 'hidden' voters: I'd guess that the demographic of 'people who refuse to answer polls' and 'people off the grid' could skew differently than the general population. Of course they're absent from polling results. How significant is this omission? (I do wonder if this was an element in forecasting the 2016 US election). Deborah, Canadian expat, Germany

I'm not sure this is a big deal to be honest. I would imagine that people who refuse to answer polls or are off the grid are also people who don't vote in elections. Turnout at the last UK general election was 69% so that leaves 31% who didn't choose to vote. That's a lot of people: the total electorate is 45.8m and the non voters, about 14.2m.

Q: Is there any proper evidence that opinion polls influence voting intention, rather than inform? Joe H, doctor, Chelmsford

Lots. One of the ironies of opinion polls is that political parties use them to successfully persuade people to vote against the anticipated outcome. Look at the last two elections. In 2015, polling was predicting a hung parliament, and David Cameron and Conservative Central Office successfully persuaded the British public to vote against what had been perceived to be a likely outcome: a Labour/SNP coalition.

Something similar happened in 2017, when the an important segment of the British public, anticipating a large Conservative majority, chose to support Labour in the last 48 hours of the campaign. The real question is whether something similar will happen this time, given that the polls are showing Boris Johnson will win an overall majority. Polls help create an underlying narrative and often change voter behaviour – and in my view there's no problem with that.

block-time published-time 1.00pm GMT

This looks good. My colleague Kate Proctor is hosting the Politics Weekly podcast, and this week she is marking the 100th anniversary of women reporting from Westminster. The episode includes contributions from Rachel Reeves, Harriet Harman, Julia Langdon, Carolyn Quinn and Kate McCann.

Related: 100 years of women reporting in Westminster – Politics Weekly special

block-time published-time 12.50pm GMT

Some of you have been sending in your questions about opinion polls which I will be answering until 1.30pm. You can share your questions with us via our form here.

Q: How can the polls take account of the huge surge of registrations to vote in the past few days? What effect do you think these new voters will have? Colin Hynson, self-employed writer and publisher, Norfolk

There have been 3.85m applications to register since the election was called at the end of October, up 31% on 2017. Those registering are disproportionately young – 2.58m, or 67% of the total – reflecting the fact that younger people tend to move around more and need to ensure their registration is up to date. In itself, that uplift should benefit Labour somewhat: at the last election, according to Ipsos Mori, 62% of 18-24s voted Labour and 56% of 25-34s. In each case the Conservative share was 27%. But don't forget that, the Conservatives are far ahead amongst older voters – 61% at the last election.

Q: If the polls are again mistaken, will the Guardian review its policy of how it covers political polling? Mat, works for a university, Birmingham

That's a decision that would be above my pay grade, but we have reviewed our policy on polling in the past. We used to write regular news stories that led on polling, and we no longer do that now. We are well aware

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that pollsters have had a mixed track record of predicting the final results, but if treated critically there is nevertheless valuable information contained within them, not least because the political parties will be seeing similar data themselves. My task as election psephologist is to look at what the polls are saying and provide some kind of analysis and context; we are cautious about over relying on any one poll and prefer to look at averages and context.

block-time published-time 12.45pm GMT

Johnson makes pitch to Labour leavers with plans for more state aid and 'buy British' policies after Brexit

In his opening statement at the press conference Boris Johnson identified some potential benefits of Brexit. (See 11.35am.) The Conservatives have fleshed these out in a press notice issued around the time the press conference was starting, and two of their announcements are significant.

* Johnson says the Tories would adopt a more interventionist approach to business after Brexit, taking advantage of the fact the UK would not longer need to comply with EU state aid rules. The press notice says:

We will back British businesses by introducing a new state aid regime which makes it faster and easier for the government to intervene to protect jobs when an industry is in trouble...

[EU rules] mean that the UK government cannot take steps to quickly and effectively help companies that are in danger.

If returned with a majority, a Boris Johnson government will take immediate steps to ensure that a new state aid regime is designed and ready to be in place by 1 January 2021. This will be a whole new approach, based on the World Trade Organisation commitments on restricting harmful subsidies. As the UK will be leaving the EU's single market, the state aid system that we introduce will be different to the EU's system.

* Johnson says the government would introduce a "buy British" policy in government procurement after Brexit, taking advantage of the UK no longer having to comply with EU rules. The press notice says:

We will back British business by fundamentally changing our public procurement policy so it promotes the local economy. This will allow us to make sure that we can boost UK SME [small and medium-sized enterprises]...

Public procurement affects over £200bn of contracts for work, supplies and services. However, thanks to EU legislation, the rules that these bodies have to follow have become absurdly complex. They impose burdensome and pointless tendering requirements for public contracts, such as having to advertise tenders in the EU's Official Journal...

If elected with a majority, a Boris Johnson government will take steps to fix this damaging situation. We will, over the course of 2020, replace the EU's public procurement regulations with new laws which are (i) simpler and cheaper; and (ii) geared towards supporting local business and promoting British business.

These are both significant announcements. In the past it has normally been Eurosceptics on the left (like Jeremy Corbyn) who have complained about EU regulations because they limit the extent to which government can use subsidies and procurement policies to protect British industries. Conservatives used to gravitate towards the pro-competition arguments, and raise concerns that policies like the ones being announced by Johnson today could end up feather-bedding inefficient industries.

Of course, we don't know the full detail of what is being planned. But potentially this is a big deal. In the press conference the Financial Times' Sebastian Payne suggested this meant the Tories were no longer pursuing a "Singapore Brexit" (ie, a move towards a deregulated, low tax economy), but a "North Korea Brexit".

Johnson announced this only a day after it was reported that Labour is revising its campaign to appeal more to leave voters. These are exactly the sort of policies that might appeal to Labour leavers, and so in part this is probably a response to Jeremy Corbyn. But it may also be an indication that Johnson is moving in the direction of blue collar Toryism.

Boris Johnson at his press conference. Photograph: Chris J Ratcliffe/Getty Images

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 1.29pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.42pm GMT

Many of your questions so far have been about how people are selected for opinion polls and whether they should be banned.

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Q: Everything. Who is selected? By phone? By landline only? By people willing to answer an unknown caller? By party? By age? By previous responses? Laura, retired

Polling companies have abandoned phone polling because people no longer pick up the phone to answer questions. Instead they have developed panels of online respondents – yes, people are paid modestly. When a poll is conducted, pollsters take a sample of 1,000 people (deemed enough to get a reasonably accurate result) from the overall panel.

The sample is intended to be statistically representative of the British population, and sometimes, for example, when enough young or old people can't be found, adjustments are made to ensure the weighting is correct. Selections are made by gender, age, social class and by past voting record. It tries to be an exact science but the question for every polling firm is this: have they recruited the right panel, from which their samples are drawn?

Q: Do you agree with me that public polls should be banned during election campaigns, as they are in other countries? They seem to be so politicised and are deployed by parties and some companies to sway people's opinions rather than record those opinions. Michael, Midlands

Attractive as it might sound, I can't agree that public polls should be banned during campaigns. What that would mean is that political parties, lobbyists, businesses, hedge funds even could carry out polling, and keep the results to themselves. The public has a right to know. Much better to keep publishing and for people to take an appropriately sceptical view of the results.

Some countries do have bans, but they are for a short period – France, I think, bans them for just the day before an election, although I am unsure what purpose that serves. In Britain, they are banned on election day itself, which does make sense, although even then some hedge funds have in the past conducted their own polls, arguably giving them a head start.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.49pm GMT

block-time published-time 12.32pm GMT

Ask our experts a question

I'm Dan Sabbagh, the Guardian's in-house election psephologist, and will be answering your questions about opinion polling today. Election psephologist is not my full-time job however, I am also the defence and security editor. I have plenty of experience of political journalism, having previously worked as a lobby reporter during the Theresa May phase of the Brexit crisis. Prior to that I was home editor, helping run the Guardian's domestic coverage, including its political team, from the news desk, over two other elections and two referendums.

If you have a question you can send it to us by filling in the form here.

block-time published-time 12.10pm GMT

Michael Gove winds up. He says Johnson has been on the platform for 45 minutes. He claims that Johnson has taken more questions at this news conference than any other politician during the campaign.

(It may be true that Johnson answered more questions at this event than Jeremy Corbyn has answered at a single event. But during the campaign as a whole Corbyn has been better at submitting himself to questioning from journalists. He has almost certainly held more events that have involved Q&As with the media.)

The event is now over. I will post a summary soon.

block-time published-time 12.04pm GMT

Q: What is your approach to screening cooperation with China?

Johnson says there is a balance to be struck between being open to trade, and not doing anything that might compromise national security.

I'm very, very far from a Sinophobe.

Q: Will fuel duty go up under the Tories?

Johnson says he has "no intention" of raising fuel duty. He says Labour would introduce huge tax rises.

Q: Will you meet Donald Trump next week?

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Johnson says he will be hosting the Nato meeting next week, and looks forward to meeting all Nato leaders.

Q: Last night you said you had not lied in your political career. But didn't you lie to Michael Howard about having an affair?

Johnson says he does not set out to mislead people. When he sets out to do something, he delivers. That is why he is so upset about the failure to deliver Brexit.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.30pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.59am GMT

Q: Do you still think the institution of the monarchy is beyond reproach?

Johnson says, in his view, the monarchy is the Queen. He implies that is what he was talking about when he said the monarchy was beyond reproach in the ITV debate. He says that is not the same as talking about the royal family.

Q: Why won't you give MPs the chance to repeal the foxhunting ban?

Johnson says he does not want to bring back foxhunting. He wants to champion animal rights. He thinks it is wrong that people aren't able to ban shark fin soup. That should be banned. You cannot do it under EU law. And you cannot ban the shipment of live animals either under EU law. What is Labour's policy on this, he asks.

Q: Can you give an example of a business over the last decade that you would have saved with state aid?

Johnson says he does not want to address this.

It would not be fair on individual companies, Michael Gove claims.

Q: Is it all over for Jacob Rees-Mogg in your government?

Johnson says any commentary on this would be seen as his "measuring up the curtains" before an election victory.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.35pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.54am GMT

Q: You say you are confident of being able to get a deal. Will you end no-deal planning?

Johnson says no-deal planning was thoroughly useful. It convinced the EU the UK was serious about leaving. He says these plans should be kept in a state of readiness. They will remain "extant", he says.

Q: You said when you became PM you would fix the crisis in social care. Now you are saying you want to discuss the problem with Labour. Isn't that political cowardice?

Johnson says this is a "huge national crisis". The government is putting more into the NHS, he says. But it is the interface between people leaving hospital and needing social care that creates the problem. The government will put an extra £1bn every year into the system to address this. He says he is reaching out to Labour.

Q: Do your state aid plans imply a North Korea Brexit?

Johnson says he believes in competition. But there are distortions sometimes introduced by the EU rules. Outside the EU, the government may be able to speed things up in relation to planning processes. And with school buses, or buses for the disabled, there may be advantages from being outside the EU.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.36pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.48am GMT

Q: Have your views on single mothers changed since 1995?

Johnson says he has addressed this.

Q: Will the new state aid rules be devolved?

Johnson says policy in this area will remain national policy.

Q: The EU won't give you a zero tariff, zero quota trade deal if you want to diverge from EU rules. Why do you think you will get a deal?

Johnsons says that under trade deals you have committees to arbitrate when there are disputes. But it should be a committee of equals.

Q: Do you favour bringing back more children born to Isis suspects to the UK?

Johnson says these cases pose difficult questions. The government is doing what it can.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.45am GMT

Q: You have blamed everyone for the failure to deliver Brexit. Are any of you willing to take responsiblity for the fact that you started this project without a plan?

Johnson says this is a great project. It is a tragedy that parliament has blocked it.

Gisela Stuart says the alternatives offered to Brexit, including Labour's alternative, is just a version of remain.

* Labour's proposed Brexit is just a version of remain, claims Gisela Stuart.

Michael Gove says he takes full responsibility for his actions. But so should the MPs – Labour and Conservative – who said they would honour the referendum result, and then blocked it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.37pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.42am GMT

Q: If you fail to get a trade deal by the end of 2020, will the UK end the transition period and leave without a deal? In the past you have made derogatory comments about single mothers. Why should they vote for you?

Johnson says he has written millions of words. People can cull them and distort them.

He says Brexit will allow the UK to cut VAT on tampons.

And the government will be able to do other things too, like introduce free ports.

He asks how Britain would benefit from the Brexit deal Labour is planning. The UK would not be able to take back control, he says. He says he has a great deal.

Coming back to his plans, he says the UK will be able to begin negotiating trade deals as soon as the UK leaves the EU.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.38pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.39am GMT

Johnson and his colleagues are now taking questions.

Q: Will you take responsibility for any damage to the economy from a no-deal Brexit? Would you run a more interventionist government? And are you running scared of the Andrew Neil interview?

Johnson says he is here, submitting himself to questions. He says John Pienaar, who asked the question, is a formidable interviewer.

He says he is confident he will be able to negotiate a trade deal with the EU by the end of next year. The UK is "in a state of grace" because it is already aligned to EU rules. That will make it easier, he suggests. He says a trade deal has never started from this point.

On state aid, he says the ramifications are felt everywhere. He says councils that try to run bus services for pupils, and then try to charge, fall foul of state aid rules because they are deemed to be in competition with other providers.

block-time published-time 11.35am GMT

Johnson lists some potential benefits of Brexit

Johnson is now speaking about the benefits from Brexit. The UK will be able to:

Buy British, in government procurement

Abolish the tampon tax

Intervene to protect British businesses

Introduce an Australian-style points-based immigration system

(This may be the first time that being able to abolish the tampon tax has been cited as the second most prominent benefit from Brexit.)

block-time published-time 11.32am GMT

Boris Johnson is speaking now.

He says this election is an opportunity to get Brexit done. Then the government can unleash the UK's potential.

He says, if he gets a majority government, he will bring the withdrawal agreement bill back before Christmas.

(Presumably that means getting MPs to give it a second reading before Christmas.)

And Johnson says the UK will be able to leave the EU by 31 January, "no ifs, not buts".

block-time published-time 11.30am GMT

Former Labour MP Gisela Stuart urges leave supporters to vote Tory this time to get Brexit done

Gisela Stuar t says she supported Tony Blair's Labour because it represented a fairer society.

Her values have not changed, she says.

But the Labour party has changed.

The Labour party of John Smith, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown has gone.

She says the country can choose change – but not by voting for Jeremy Corbyn.

In this election, she will not vote for Corbyn. But she can vote for Brexit. A vote for Boris Johnson this time is a vote to get Brexit done.

She says this does not mean she is a Tory, or that she will vote for Johnson in future elections.

She urges other leave voters to do the same.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.40pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.26am GMT

Gove claims vote against Tories is vote against change

Gove says a vote for any party other than the Conservative party is a vote against change.

block-time published-time 11.24am GMT

Boris Johnson's press conference

Boris Johnson is holding a rare press conference. He is appearing with two of his colleagues from the Vote Leave campaign - Michael Gove, the Cabinet Office minister, and Gisela Stuart, the former Labour MP.

There is a live feed at the top of the blog.

Michael Gove starts. He says the vote to leave the EU in 2016 was a vote for change.

block-time published-time 11.22am GMT

Labour claims Johnson's attempt to disown past single mother comments show he's 'liar as well as sexist'

In his LBC phone-in Boris Johnson was asked by a caller, a single mother, why he made disparaging comments about single mothers in a Spectator column in the 1990s when he was not willing to discuss his own family circumstances.

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For the benefit of listeners, the present, Nick Ferrari, elaborated on what Johnson had written. Ferrari said:

Let me just share, these are comments that go back to the mid-90s, they're featured in today's Daily Mirror, I have to read them: On working class men you said: 'They're likely to be drunk, criminal, aimless, feckless, and hopeless and perhaps claiming to suffer from low self-esteem brought on by unemployment.' On single mothers, 'they're uppity' – which is a word with its own issues – and 'irresponsible', and on their children, they're 'ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate'. You've dismissed quite a chunk of the electorate there haven't you?

Johnson claimed these comments had been taken out of context. Addressing the caller, he replied:

I just want to say to you that I mean absolutely no disrespect to you or indeed towards anybody. But these are 25-year-old quotations, culled from articles written before I was even in politics. And which actually when you look at the article itself bears no resemblance to what is claimed.

In response, Angela Rayner, the shadow education secretary who was a single mother in her teens, said:

Boris Johnson's refusal to apologise for his hateful comments about single mothers, their children and working class men is an absolute disgrace.

He tried to deny what he wrote, but the evidence is there in black and white for us all to see, proving once again that he's a liar as well as a sexist.

According to Boris Johnson, when I was a young single mum, I should have been pushed into 'destitution on a Victorian scale'. Johnson appallingly and hypocritically claims that children of single mums are 'ill-raised, ignorant, aggressive and illegitimate'.

From attacking single mothers working hard to raise their kids, to advocating sexual harassment in the workplace, Boris Johnson has demonstrated his contempt for women and working class people. Under the Conservatives we stand to lose the rights we have won over decades of struggle. He is not fit to be an MP, let alone prime minister.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 12.44pm GMT

block-time published-time 11.04am GMT

Sky's Rob Powell has more on Boris Johnson's throat-cutting gesture during the LBC phone-in.

enltrAt around 0950 in the interview they return to why he drew his hand across his throat. PM says the reason is because he was imitating Nick Ferrari (off-screen). Nick F says he was doing it because a producer was talking to him down his headphones too loudly. https://t.co/13gN7P003H

— Rob Powell (@robpowellnews) November 29, 2019

block-time published-time 10.47am GMT

Good morning. I'm Andrew Sparrow, taking over from Jedidajah Otte.

Here is some reaction to the Boris Johnson LBC phone-in from political journalists and commentators.

enltrBoris Johnson on LBC: "When I say I'm going to do something in politics, I generally achieve what I set out to do."

Not sure all would agree with that.

Johnson says the Garden Bridge in London was "a viable project" when he left office as mayor. This is simply not true.

— Peter Walker (@peterwalker99) November 29, 2019

enltrBoris Johnson tells LBC that every member of the Shadow Cabinet is in favour of remain, other than Jeremy Corbyn.

That it nonsense.

Plenty of Labour frontbenchers have said they'd look at the deal, some like @jon_trickett have signalled they would vote Brexit #GE2019

— Rob Powell (@robpowellnews) November 29, 2019

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enltrIssue with interviewing Boris Johnson is that, even for a politician, he is both hugely evasive and deliberately long-winded, setting off on Just a Minute-style rambles to run down the clock. Interviewer needs to be both hugely focused and extremely blunt in keeping him on track.

— Peter Walker (@peterwalker99) November 29, 2019

enltrThey don't like it up 'em! Boris Johnson blathers off into a side track calling Sadiq Khan "Macavity the mystery cat" after a question about youth funding. But when he's asked where another cat, Jacob Rees *Mogg*, is he sniffs: "That's frankly irrelevant to Amir's question"

— Dan Bloom (@danbloom1) November 29, 2019

enltrBoris slightly unravelling on @NickFerrariLBC Seems to think a refurbished hospital is the same as building an entirely new one #LBCINews

— John Crace (@JohnJCrace) November 29, 2019

enltrUh oh. That's not exactly a resounding endorsement of @Jacob_Rees_Mogg.

Boris Johnson refuses to confirm he will keep his job after election.

"I'm not going to go into my conversations with colleagues. I'm not going get into measuring up the curtains type conversations."

— Pippa Crerar (@PippaCrerar) November 29, 2019

enltrHuge sigh from @BorisJohnson when caller, Ruth, declares "I'm a single mother...why do you makes comments like these about my family when you won't discuss your own". Claims the quotes are distortions. Leaps away to berate John McDonnell. Stops answering Ruth. My turn to sigh.

— Shelagh Fogarty (@ShelaghFogarty) November 29, 2019

enltrBoris Johnson says all the reports about the many offensive comments he has made in the past are "absolute distortions" of what he wrote.

Here's his comments in full context, with links to the original sources. https://t.co/6RSBcNd25e

— Adam Bienkov (@AdamBienkov) November 29, 2019

enltrNick Ferrari has become the interviewer to finally point to the sizeable elephant in the room, openly asking Boris Johnson: how many children do you have, and are you fully involved in their lives?

Johnson says he does not believe the electorate want to know about this. Hmmm.

— Peter Walker (@peterwalker99) November 29, 2019

enltrOh dear.

Nobody thinks a Greggs sausage roll costs as much as £1.90.... except Boris Johnsonon @LBC

— Joe Murphy (@JoeMurphyLondon) November 29, 2019

enltrThat turned into a fairly uncomfortable LBC chat for Boris Johnson overall. For all his attempts to turn it to Brexit, the question of his character, trustworthiness and readiness to offend came up a lot. Well done to Nick Ferrari and the listeners.

— Peter Walker (@peterwalker99) November 29, 2019

enltrThat was a bruising hour for Boris Johnson... difficult exchanges on.,..

- Trade deals

- Hospitals

- Social care

- Apprenticeships

- Single mums

- Russia

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- Future of Mogg

- Andrew Neil interview

Bravo Nick Ferrari, LBC and the callers. #GE2019

— Rob Powell (@robpowellnews) November 29, 2019

enltrJohnson reveals his "not going to do the interview" signal while keeping up the fake avuncular tone. Look into his eyes. https://t.co/yp0X280esv

— stefanstern (@stefanstern) November 29, 2019

block-time published-time 10.15am GMT

The Scottish National party leader, Nicola Sturgeon, is on BBC Woman's Hour. If she had the option of supporting a Jeremy Corbyn-led government, would she support it? Her party is not in favour of a formal coalition, she says, but she could never allow herself to do anything that could aide Boris Johnson, hinting that she might consider propping up Labour, if that kept Johnson out of power.

She "deplores" Corbyn's lack of leadership in regard to antisemitism, Sturgeon says. If you are concerned about Corbyn, wouldn't progressive SNP MP's be the better option? Sturgeon asks.

What does she say to the nearly 40% of Scottish leave voters? These voters were probably frustrated by austerity, and she would tell them that these issues needed to be addressed.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 11.07am GMT

block-time published-time 10.06am GMT

He would give Corbyn a calculator for Christmas, so he can realise the extent of the debts he would be racking up with his plans, Johnson says.

Asked about a recent claim Johnson made about being "made of Greggs", Ferrari asks the PM how much a sausage roll costs. "I give up," Johnson says. "£1.90?" he guesses eventually.

He has also eaten vegan sausage rolls, Johnson says. And that's it.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.13am GMT

block-time published-time 10.00am GMT

Asked about the nationwide cladding crisis resulting from the Grenfell distaster, Johnson says the government was working "as fast as they can" on making buildings safe, and that he's planning to look at the issue from "top to bottom". "What does that mean?" Ferrari intervenes. He never liked this type of cladding, the PM says, but fails to give an answer containing any figures, research or detailed approaches the government might be considering.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.19am GMT

block-time published-time 9.56am GMT

Should Corbyn apologise for antisemitism in his party?

Johnson says he thinks it's "incredible" that Labour had "moved so far to the left" and "sticks up for Hamas, or Tehran, Putin".

He is deeply sorry for the offence caused by his remarks about Muslim women. Is he sorry about using those words [eg letterboxes] or the offence caused? Ferrari asks.

Johnson answers a different question for the umpteenth time. "So you stand by these words," Ferrari states.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.23am GMT

block-time published-time 9.51am GMT

How come Johnson is prepared to comment on other people's children if he isn't prepared to talk about his own? Ferrari asks. "How many children do you have? Are you fully and wholly involved in all their lives?"

"I don't think this is what the nation wants to hear," Johnson says, after a lengthy attempt to deflect.

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Is there another Johnson on the way? he is asked. The PM struggles again, stammers a few lines about getting Brexit done.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.15am GMT

block-time published-time 9.46am GMT

The PM pledges that his government would not raise any income tax, VAT and national insurance contributions, and will cut business rates in the first budget.

The caller says her children suffered stigma caused by comments made by Boris Johnson about single mothers at the time.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 9.47am GMT

block-time published-time 9.44am GMT

A caller says she is a single mother and doesn't appreciate comments about single mothers he made in a Spectator column in 1995.

These are 25-year-old quotations from "before I was even in politics", Johnson says, and just another attempt by the Labour party to distract from the reality that they have no Brexit plan. He means no disrespect to anyone, he says.

The quotations are "absolute distortions of what I said," Johnson adds, then promptly switches to bashing the Labour party.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.25am GMT

block-time published-time 9.40am GMT

Why should I vote for you if you can't even debate the climate change? a caller asks.

"I can't do absolutely every debate," Johnson says. This government is committed to getting carbon-free by 2050, he says.

What about his response to the flooding, Ferrari asks? His government is "absolutely second-to-none in Europe" on issues relating to the tackling of climate change, the PM says. He has "absolute sympathy" for the flooding victims, he adds.

Ferrari accuses him of missing all sorts of important meetings. Johnson declines to answer.

"We want to be a world leader in climate change," he says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.16am GMT

block-time published-time 9.35am GMT

Johnson promises new apprenticeships to help young offenders with their rehabilitation. Ferrari asks what companies these apprenticeships would be with. Johnson names one, but seemingly doesn't know the names of any others.

The police have to be given the authority for stop and search in order for people to be deterred from carrying knives, he says.

Where is Jacob Rees-Mogg ? Ferrari asks. What did the PM say to him after he made widely criticised derogatory comments about the victims of the Grenfell tragedy? The PM doesn't answer and digresses again, but is eventually cornered.

"I'm not going to go into my conversations with colleagues," the PM says, clearly thrown by Ferrari's insistence that he answer this question.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.17am GMT

block-time published-time 9.28am GMT

The next caller asks Johnson about his plans for social care.

We're putting £1.5bn in, and another billion every year for the next five years.

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Johnson is pressed about a statement he made a few weeks back, in which he expressed that he doesn't think anybody should have to sell their home to get social care. How will it then be funded? Ferrari asks. Johnson grumbles and mumbles for a bit. "You don't know, do you? […] You don't have a clue!" Ferrari says. "I don't have this figure now, no," Johnson says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.18am GMT

block-time published-time 9.24am GMT

Ferrari quizzes the PM on misleading pledges about building "new" hospitals, when really some of them will only be rebuilt. Johnson says that he feels a rebuilt hospital is a new one.

The nurse who called in says the PM's comments have "done nothing" to convince her that she should keep going to work. Johnson sighs.

block-time published-time 9.21am GMT

Johnson asks callers to compare the "635 Tory MPs determined to get Brexit done" with a Labour shadow cabinet in which virtually every MP except Corbyn is opposed to Brexit.

The next caller is a Waspi woman and a qualified nurse of 34 years. How can the PM convince her that he'll deliver tens of thousands of new nurses as promised?

The PM says he doesn't know about Corbyn's £58bn pledged for paying off Waspi women.

Why did he misrepresent the 50,000 new nurses figure? Ferrari asks. He says there are 19,000 nurses now who want to leave. There are a further 31,000 that we wish to recruit." He has to admit only 31,000 of the 50,000 pledged ones will be new.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.19am GMT

block-time published-time 9.15am GMT

If you had one option only, would you rather be PM or leave the EU? the PM is asked. He'd get out of the EU, Johnson says, after a brief moment of hesitation.

January 31st is still the exit deadline, and Britain will "definitely" be out by then, he says.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.20am GMT

block-time published-time 9.12am GMT

When asked how many trade deals the government had on the table so far, the PM first says he doesn't know, then says "I imagine around a dozen". He is asked to name about four. He says India, Australia, New Zealand and China are all possibilities, and is derided by presenter Ferrari for "whispering" into the microphone.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.20am GMT

block-time published-time 9.09am GMT

Boris Johnson's LBC phone-in

The PM is now live on LBC. Jeremy Corbyn and Jo Swinson will be joining the programme at a later stage over the next two weeks.

The first Q by presenter Nick Ferrari is about the NHS. Is it for sale? Johnson is asked whether he can be trusted, given that he has lost his job before for lying.

Johnson says there is "no evidence" that the UK government wants to sell the NHS.

The PM switches to talking about Jeremy Corbyn and his "pointless and divisive" referendum next year, as well as Labour's "catastrophic" neutral position on Brexit.

When pressed, Johnson says people "should" trust him. The reason trust was being eroded was that 17.4m people had voted to Leave and had been let down so far, he added.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.29am GMT

block-time published-time 8.59am GMT

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Boris Johnson will be taking questions of callers on LBC Radio shortly.

block-time published-time 8.52am GMT

The education secretary Gavin Williamson told the Today show that the Conservatives would put an extra £10m into Ofsted, the education watchdog, to strengthen the quality of inspection.

When asked whether he regretted that a Conservative government previously had cut Ofsted's funding significantly, by 52% in real terms between 2000 and 2017, Williamson said he didn't believe this had been a mistake, and that the Tories had simply been "dealing with an economic crisis the last Labour government had created".

Asked whether the Tories were "threatening" Channel 4, Williamson said that was not the case, and that his party was simply raising a "perfectly legitimate" complaint. He said that whoever would form the next government would review Channel 4's public licence in 2024, and denied that the Conservatives had issued a licence review threat in retaliation.

"The government has no plans [...] in terms of changing what Channel 4 does," Williamson said, but added that the broadcaster's ice sculpture stunt was "a gimmick" and "a shame".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.23am GMT

block-time published-time 8.30am GMT

Labour just tweeted a list of 60 questions that should be answered by Boris Johnson during his press conference this morning, the party argues.

Questions range from 'Do you still think that the way to deal with advice from a female colleague is to "just pat her on the bottom and send her on her way"?' to 'Do you still call gay people "tank-topped bumboys"?'.

enltrTime to tell the truth

Ahead of Boris Johnson's press conference this morning, the Labour party has published 60 questions that the Prime Minister must answer, including on his racism, on his sexism, on his party's record, on his Ministers, on the NHS and on Jennifer Arcuri. pic.twitter.com/B6uLBWxZkJ

— Labour Press Team (@labourpress) November 29, 2019

block-time published-time 8.27am GMT

Stanley Johnson, the PM's father, said he exchanged messages with his son last night, and that substituting him with Michael Gove would have led to an interesting discussion about an urgent matter. "Are you saying that Michael Gove is not a leader?" Stanley Johnson told BBC Breakfast. "Why play schoolboy games with ice sculptures?"

He said he wasn't "privy" to where the PM had been last night, and stated that the melting ice sculpture row sadly overshadowed a "majorly important debate".

"Mr Gove was a very valid substitute," he said, adding that any PM might have more important things to do, and that Gove was "probably the best environment secretary this country has ever had".

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.24am GMT

block-time published-time 8.10am GMT

The Conservatives' formal complaint to Channel 4 claims the Tories were "deprived of representation" when the channel refused to let Michael Gove fill in for the PM.

The broadcaster had decided to put up ice sculptures in place of Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage, who both failed to turn up for last night's climate debate between party leaders.

Gavin Williamson, the education minister, told BBC Breakfast the broadcaster had "slammed the door" in Michael Gove's face, and accused Channel 4 of bias.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 8.13am GMT

block-time published-time 7.55am GMT

Johnson should do Andrew Neil interview as 'matter of honour', says McDonnell

McDonnell said he was “so annoyed” about Boris Johnson not appearing on the BBC to be grilled by Andrew Neil, and that the BBC should be annoyed, too. “All political parties understood that there would be sequence of interviews with each leader,” McDonnell told the Today show. “I think this is a matter of honour.”

The PM was “playing the BBC”, pushing an appearance until the deadline for postal votes had passed, thinking “his Bullingdon Club friends” were above public scrutiny, and was running scared of interviewer Neil, who would “take him apart”, McDonnell said.

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.28am GMT

block-time published-time 7.49am GMT

McDonnell denied that the party had made a change in strategy. Labour’s “Brexit strategy’, he said, was negotiating a “sensible and credible” deal, while also ensuring that “people have the option of remain”, within six months there would be a referendum.

He said the party’s pitch to leave voters would be to give people hope. “If you think things are alright at the moment, you vote for the Conservatives,” he said. “But I don’t think people do think things are alright at the moment.”

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.29am GMT

block-time published-time 7.43am GMT

Hi there, I’m taking over from my colleague Kate Lyons now.

John McDonnell, the shadow chancellor, is on BBC Radio 4’s Today show this morning, talking about Labour’s regional manifestos, which are being launched today. Number one priority in Labour’s efforts to regenerate the local economy across the country and tackle regional inequality, McDonnell said, was tackling climate change. Alternative energy sources would have to be pushed and dependency on fossil fuel phased out, he said, promising “massive investments in on- and off-shore wind”, “9000 turbines, 100 000 jobs”, and huge investments in electric cars, which would lead to 32.000 new jobs. 20.000 jobs would be created via investments in solar power, McDonnell said.

Overall Labour would be investing £250bn over ten years. Asked what he would tell critics doubting the credibility of these plans, McDonnell said the IFS “attacked us for being too ambitious.”

“Yes, we can,” McDonnell said.

block-time published-time 6.50am GMT

The day ahead

On the Labour side of things, Jeremy Corbyn is currently not scheduled to make any appearances on Friday but the shadow transport secretary, Andy McDonald, will be in the east Midlands as the party launches its regional manifestos targeting local issues. The Scottish Labour leader, Richard Leonard, will be in Livingston to discuss the party’s package for young people.

Boris Johnson is expected to hold a press conference in London on Friday morning. Expect ice jokes.

Johnson has also declined an invitation to a leaders debate tonight in Cardiff, as have Corbyn and Farage. But leaders of the Lib Dems, SNP, Green and Plaid parties will attend a BBC seven-way debate alongside representatives of the Conservatives, Labour and the Brexit party.

The Lib Dem leader, Jo Swinson, will be in south Wales to discuss safety issues with senior members of the Muslim and Jewish communities and will then attend the BBC debate.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats are launching their manifesto in Edinburgh.

block-time published-time 6.33am GMT

The Guardian can also reveal 11 wealthy American donors who have given a total of more than $3.7m (£2.9m) to rightwing UK groups in the past five years, raising questions about the influence of foreign funding on British politics. The groups are here.

In the wake of the Brexit vote, some of the ultra free-market thinktanks, which have received funding from the groups, have gained exceptional access to the heart of Boris Johnson’s government, as the investigations team unpacks in today’s long read.

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block-time published-time 6.21am GMT

Our north of England editor, Helen Pidd, has been to Morecambe to pen the latest of out constituency profiles. The seat of Morecambe and Lunesdale is natural Labour territory yet it has a Tory MP, David Morris, and Helen found that many Labour-leaning voters were not convinced about Jeremy Corbyn. “He does come across as a man of integrity and honesty, but not strength,” says Tracy Kohl, who runs a help centre for the many people in the area struggling with the impact of nine years of austerity.

Tracy Kohl, founder and managing director at West End Impact centre in Morecambe. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

block-time published-time 6.02am GMT

Good morning and welcome to the election live blog. The first action of the day is likely to involve the fallout from last night’s leaders’ climate debate on Channel 4 in which the producers inserted a melting ice sculpture in place of Boris Johnson when the Tory leader pulled out of the programme. Channel 4 refused to allow Michael Gove to substitute for Johnson, prompting the Conservative party to suggest that it could review the channel’s remit if it retains power on 12 December.

As for the debate itself, leaders of the other parties vied to prove their crisis-fighting credentials. Our environment correspondent, Fiona Harvey, writes today that the biggest loser was Johnson for failing to turn up, but also noted that Lib Dem leader Jo Swinson appeared to be outflanked by Jeremy Corbyn on what what was once one of her party’s strongest suits. Also today, children across the UK are striking from school for climate action.

The other main stories this morning are:

* Tory candidates have been given a detailed dossier on how to attack Labour and Liberal Democrat rivals, which contains numerous rehashed and potentially misleading claims.

* The BBC is demanding the Conservatives take down Facebook adverts featuring footage of its journalists Laura Kuenssberg and Huw Edwards.

* The Conservatives have pledged to boost Ofsted’s power to inspect schools

* Sikhs in the Conservative party have been critical after the leadership failed to take action against former minister Philip Dunne after he told a rival at a hustings that he was “talking through his turban”.

* And Gary Younge writes today about how, given Britain’s history, it’s no surprise that racism still infects our politics

block-time updated-timeUpdated at 10.27am GMT

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Mail Online

News

ACLU calls for tampons and other feminine hygiene products to be placed in men's restrooms to achieve 'menstrual equity' for transgender and non-binary individuals

Lauren Edmonds For Dailymail.com
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19 December 2019
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Mail Online
DAMONL
English
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* The American Civil Liberties Union has called for men's restrooms to be stocked with tampons and other menstrual products

* They maintain that menstrual products should be available to all, including transgender and non-binary

* ACLU argues that there is a lack of access to menstrual products in many spaces specified for men

* The nonprofit group says accessibility to menstrual products for all will help achieve menstrual equity

The American Civil Liberties Union is asking that men's restrooms now include tampons and other menstrual products to push back against sex discrimination for 'every person' who menstruates.

The ACLU released a statement on Tuesday presenting their argument for accessible menstrual products in men's bathrooms to fully accommodate transgender and non-binary people.

'While free menstrual products are not uniformly provided in women’s restrooms, they are almost never available in men’s restrooms, even for pay,' the statement read.

'Men’s restrooms are also less likely to have a place to dispose of these products conveniently, privately, and hygienically.'

ACLU also pointed out that men's homeless shelters typically do not provide menstrual products, and it is a similar situation in men's prisons.

'While access to menstrual products in women’s prisons is often inadequate, it is far worse in men’s prisons. Trans and non-binary people may be incarcerated in either,' they wrote.

The nonprift legal organization critiqued the notion that only women menstruate, get pregnant and breast feed, as an inaccurate portrayal.

'Menstrual stigma and period poverty can hit trans and non-binary people particularly hard,' the statement read.

Additionally, ACLU said that trans and non-binary people may need access to menstrual products for reasons beyond menstruation.

These groups may need pads and liners after undergoing an vaginaplasty, a surgical procedure that results in the construction of the vagina, and other factors.

Those diagnosed with endometriosis or adenomyosis reportedly face barriers when seeking treatment and menstrual products.

ACLU concluded: 'Simply stated: because limited access to and the cost of menstrual products can hit trans and non-binary communities especially hard, as a matter of policy, a holistic agenda for menstrual equity and access must include trans people.'

'We don’t need to erase trans or non-binary people to show that barriers to menstrual equity, such as the tax on menstrual products, are unconstitutional sex discrimination,' they continued.

'It relies on sexist ideas that women’s needs are frivolous and unnecessary. It is irrational, and it directly affects cis and trans women, trans men, and non-binary people. It’s unfair, unconstitutional, and illegal.'

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ACLU linked to a Menstrual Equality Toolkit that was created to help those interested in advancing 'menstrual equity' in U.S. states.

'Menstrual equity is a basic equity issue. Just as we have regulated the provision of toilet paper and paper towels in public restrooms, so too should we do the same for menstrual products,' the report said.

One of the sex discrimination issues ACLU fights for is menstrual equity, which refers to equal access to related hygiene products and reproductive rights.

This includes the 'tampon tax' that they define as, 'regular sales tax or value-added tax applied to menstrual products — or, conversely, the failure of the state to otherwise exempt these products from sales tax by placing them in the category of necessity.'

In November, ACLU shared a tweet on International Men's Day that foreshadowed their latest stance.

'There’s no one way to be a man. Men who get their periods are men. Men who get pregnant and give birth are men. Trans and non-binary men belong,' they wrote.

ACLU has long heralded members of disenfranchised groups and those facing legal discrimination.

They have previously sued the state of Iowa for allegedly violating the constitution by allowing government officials to withhold Medicaid funds for gender dysphoria surgeries.

'This cruel amendment has no basis in medicine or science. Every major medical association agrees gender dysphoria is a serious medical condition and that surgical treatment is medically necessary for some transgender people,' said Rita Bettis Austen, Legal Director of the ACLU of Iowa.

'It is a clear violation of equal protection under the Iowa Constitution because it facially and intentionally discriminates against people simply because they are transgender,' she continued.

Similarly, the group sued PeaceHealth, a Catholic healthcare organization, for refusing to cover gender-related surgeries.

A subsequent lawsuit settlement saw PeaceHealth change their medical plan to include coverage for 'transgender surgeries' in 2017.

In 2017, the ACLU sued the state of Ohio to allow Transgender Individuals the ability to change the gender on their birth certificates.

Susan Becker, General Counsel for the ACLU of Ohio, said: 'This policy is not only archaic and out-of-step with the rest of America but also dangerous.'

'Forcing transgender Ohioans to go through life with inaccurate birth certificates, a basic form of identification, unnecessarily exposes them to discrimination, harassment, and violence.'

Two years prior, the ACLU Illinois chapter took part in a case about a teenager's gender and their locker room presence.

'A transgender girl is female. She is a girl through and through – not something in between as the District suggests,' ACLU said in a blog post.

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Mail Online

News

End of the tampon tax: Chancellor Rishi Sunak will axe the unpopular levy on sanitary products in his first Budget

John Stevens Deputy Political Editor For The Daily Mail
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English
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* Widely-unpopular levy will be axed when Britain exits the transition period

* EU law has prevented members from reducing rate below five per cent

* It treated tampons and sanitary pads as luxury items and not essential

The ‘tampon tax’ will be abolished in the Budget with VAT no longer charged on sanitary products from the start of next year.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak will promise to axe the widely-unpopular levy when the Brexit transition period ends on December 31.

EU law has so far prevented member states from reducing the rate below 5 per cent, which means tampons and pads are treated as luxury items and not essentials. The Government plans to introduce the zero rate on January 1, the first day EU laws no longer apply to the UK.

The Treasury estimates the move will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Critics have long criticised the tax for contributing to ‘period poverty’, where sanitary products are pushed out of reach because of their cost. Tampons and towels have been subject to five different tax rates since 1973.

The UK first introduced VAT in 1973, with a standard rate of 10 per cent applied to sanitary products. In 1974, standard VAT was cut to 8 per cent, before rising to 15 per cent in 1979 and 17.5 per cent in 1991.

The Government moved sanitary products to a reduced rate of 5 per cent in January 2001 following a campaign and debates in Parliament. Since 2015, revenues raised from VAT charges on tampons and pads have been used to fund charities that aid vulnerable women. More than £62million has been allocated since the scheme was launched.

Campaigners last night welcomed the end of the tampon tax but raised concerns the Treasury is not planning to replace the tampon tax fund with other investment.

Vivienne Hayes, chief executive of the Women’s Resource Centre charity, said: ‘We are over the moon to learn of this news. Tampons and sanitary towels were never luxury items and should never have been subject to VAT.

‘Congratulations to all the women who campaigned so long for this ridiculous and unfair tax to be removed. We are concerned that the tampon tax fund will now be abandoned by the Government and we hope to see a replacement fund for women’s health and support charities announced in the near future.’

Campaigners also urged Boris Johnson to go further and spend the £700million they estimate has been raised during the tax’s lifetime on women’s charities.

The European Commission published proposals to cover the scrapping of the tampon tax in 2022.

Mr Sunak, who became Chancellor last month following the resignation of Sajid Javid, is expected to use his first Budget to announce support for families, businesses and public services in the fight against the spread of coronavirus. Yesterday the Government confirmed that a national infrastructure strategy to invest £100billion boosting the economy and tackling the climate crisis will be delayed until after next week’s Budget.

The plan to improve transport connectivity and work toward achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 had been scheduled to be published alongside the Budget.

But Mr Sunak is now not expected to unveil the plans, which are seen as being crucial to the Government's 'levelling up' agenda, until a later date.

A Downing Street spokesman said: 'It is vital that we give these decisions the proper time and care they deserve.

'The national infrastructure plan will follow in the coming months and government officials are working on it as a priority.'

The Chancellor is expected to boost pensions tax relief for high earners in a bid to persuade NHS doctors not to reduce their hours.

Workers who earn more than £110,000 can have their annual tax-free pension savings allowance reduced from £40,000 to as little as £10,000 under current rules.

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The Daily Telegraph

News

Budget will axe tampon tax as Britain breaks free of EU rules

Amy Jones
277 words
7 March 2020
The Daily Telegraph
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THE controversial "tampon tax" will be scrapped in next week's Budget, as Britain breaks free from EU rules.

Brussels laws have prevented the Treasury from reducing the VAT rate on sanitary products below five per cent, meaning tampons and pads are treated as luxury items and not essentials.

But Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, plans to scrap the levy on January 1, the first day the bloc's rules no longer apply to the UK. Ending the tax on pads and tampons will save the average woman almost £40 over her lifetime.

The tampon tax raises £15million a year for the Treasury, which, in recent years, has donated the money to women's charities and organisations. The Tampon Tax Fund was established in 2015 and has so far allocated £47million for charities working with vulnerable women and girls.

Laura Coryton, a campaigner who launched a Change.org petition in 2014, said: "This is amazing and such a cause for celebration. So many people have been campaigning about this for generations and finally we're being listened to." Vivienne Hayes, chief executive of the Women's Resource Centre charity, said: "We are over the moon to learn of this news, tampons and sanitary towels were never luxury items and should never have been subject to VAT."

She also urged Boris Johnson to spend the £700million they estimate has been raised during the tax's lifetime to be paid to women's charities. Critics have criticised the tax for contributing to "period poverty", where sanitary products are pushed out of reach because of their cost.

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theguardian

UK news
Budget 2020: chancellor plans to finally end tampon tax

Patrick Collinson
701 words
9 March 2020
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The 5% rate on sanitary products will end. Rishi Sunak also plans to ensure banks keep circulating cash

The chancellor will announce the abolition of the “tampon tax” in next week’s budget, marking the successful conclusion to a 20-year campaign by women’s rights activists.

Tampons and other women’s sanitary products currently have 5% VAT added to their price, but this will be scrapped, saving the average woman £40 over her lifetime. The tax will be dropped when the transition period for Britain leaving the EU ends on 31 December.

In a separate move, Rishi Sunak is also expected to announce in the budget measures to protect access to cash. The chancellor is expected to introduce new laws that will ensure banks continue to circulate cash around the country and that it remains available to those who want to use it.

The independent Access to Cash Review last year warned that Britain’s cash system was on the verge of collapse. Natalie Ceeney, who chaired the report, said: “A guaranteed future for cash will be extremely welcome. We need the proposed legislation to be introduced quickly, so that we can maintain a viable cash system in the UK while so many people need it.”

The scrapping of the tampon tax is a victory for the two-decade long campaign by women’s groups against VAT rules that once categorised tampons as “non-essential, luxury items”.

Twenty years ago, Labour MP Dawn Primarolo successfully led a campaign to cut the VAT on tampons from 17.5% to 5%, but governments since then have said that EU rules have prohibited dropping the rate any further.

Sunak is expected to announce that the tax will finally be abolished when the transition period for leaving the EU ends in December 2020.

It is thought the tax cut will be worth 7p off a pack of 20 tampons and 5p off a pack of 12 pads.

Campaigners said they were jubilant. Laura Coryton started the Stop Taxing Periods campaign in May 2014 while a student at Goldsmiths, with her petition gaining more than 320,000 signatures.

She said: “The end of this tax symbolises the end of a symptom of sexism and the period taboo, which has created period poverty and has stopped girls from going to school. I’m so happy that all 320,000 people who signed my petition, as well as the many generations who have campaigned against this tax, have finally been listened to.”

The government has long insisted that the EU VAT Directive has prevented it from applying a rate of tax lower than 5%, although in 2016 the then prime minister David Cameron said he had persuaded European ministers to agree to change the rules to allow zero-rating of sanitary products, but that the implementation would take several years.

Paula Sherriff, who as a Labour MP campaigned against the tampon tax, said: “I am pleased that the tampon tax is finally being scrapped. Contrary to government claims, permission was granted to 0% rate menstrual products in 2016, following acceptance of my budget amendment. This was achieved through tireless campaigning by so many including the indefatigable Laura Coryton.”

Elsewhere in the EU, there have been widespread campaigns to lower the tax, with Germany recently reducing its tampon tax to 7% from 19%.

In 2015, then chancellor George Osborne pledged that he would channel tax raised from VAT on tampons directly to charities that help women. Since then, £47m has been passed to the charities, although this will come to an end when the new zero rate of VAT on sanitary products is introduced.

The decision to pass the tax money to women's charities was not without controversy. It emerged in 2017 that £250,000 of the money was handed to Life, a charity that campaigns against abortion.

• This article was amended on 9 March 2020 to clarify that the tax will be dropped on 31 December, which will be the end of the Brexit transition period, not when Britain leaves the EU as originally stated, because this happened at the end of January.

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theguardian

UK news

Rishi Sunak confirms tampon tax will be scrapped

Rebecca Smithers
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The Guardian
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7
English
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Women's sanitary products will be zero-rated for VAT after end of Brexit transition period

The chancellor confirmed in his budget that the government is to scrap the controversial tampon tax and abolish VAT on all women's sanitary products from 2021.

Tampons and other women's sanitary products currently attract 5% VAT.This will be dropped when the transition period for Britain departure from the EU ends on 31 December.

The decision marks a victory in the 20-year campaign by women's groups against 50-year-old VAT rules that once categorised tampons as "non-essential, luxury items".

The government estimates that the tax cut will lead to typical savings of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on a pack of 12 pads, which could save the average woman an estimated £40 over her lifetime.

Rishi Sunak said: "From January next year, there will be no VAT whatsoever on women's sanitary products. I congratulate all members and right honourable members who campaigned for this."

The Labour MP Dawn Primarolo led a successful campaign 20 years ago to cut VAT on tampons from 17.5% to 5%, but governments since then have said EU rules prohibited dropping the rate further.

The Treasury pledged to scrap the tampon tax in 2016 following the Stop Taxing Periods campaign launched by the student Laura Coryton, but the promise fell by the wayside after the government failed to change EU law.

Coryton said: "The end of this tax symbolises the end of a symptom of sexism and the period taboo, which has created period poverty and has stopped girls from going to school."

Campaigners urged retailers and manufacturers to pass on the cuts.

"It is good to see the tampon tax finally removed, thanks to the work of period poverty campaigners" said Sam Smethers, the chief executive of the Fawcett Society. "Now manufacturers need to pass the saving on to the women and girls who rely on these products."

Tesco took a preemptive move in 2017, reducing the price of women's sanitary products by 5%.

Document GRDN000020200311eg3b003k0

Mail Online

News

Tampon tax abolished: Rishi Sunak announces charge will be scrapped in January next year when EU rules no longer apply to the UK

Jack Maidment, Deputy Political Editor For Mailonline
557 words
11 March 2020
15:09
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
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* Brexit means the UK will now be able to scrap VAT charged on sanitary products

* Tampon tax will be abolished in January after end of the Brexit transition period

* EU laws mean members not allowed to cut VAT on products below five per cent

Rishi Sunak today announced he will abolish the so-called tampon tax from January next year when the UK no longer has to follow EU rules.

Laws made in Brussels have meant Britain has been unable to scrap VAT on women's sanitary products despite growing calls and mounting pressure from campaigners.

But Mr Sunak said the UK's departure from the bloc means Britain will soon be able to set its own policy on the matter.

Delivering his first Budget as Chancellor, Mr Sunak told the House of Commons: 'I can also confirm now that we have left the EU that I will abolish the tampon tax.

'From January next year there will be no VAT whatsoever on women's sanitary products.

'And I congratulate all members and right honorable members who campaigned for this.'

The UK and Brussels are currently in a Brexit 'standstill' transition period during which the former has agreed to follow EU rules.

That transition period will end on December 31. Mr Sunak's announcement means the UK will scrap the tampon tax as soon as it is free to diverge from EU regulations.

Existing EU law has prevented member states from reducing the VAT rate on sanitary products below five per cent.

That means tampons and pads are technically classed as luxury items and not essentials.

The Treasury estimates removing VAT from the products will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Critics have long criticised the tax for contributing to ‘period poverty’, where sanitary products are pushed out of reach because of their cost.

Tampons and towels have been subject to five different tax rates since 1973.

The UK first introduced VAT in 1973, with a standard rate of 10 per cent applied to sanitary products.

In 1974, standard VAT was cut to eight per cent, before rising to 15 per cent in 1979 and 17.5 per cent in 1991.

The Government moved sanitary products to a reduced rate of five per cent in January 2001 following a campaign and debates in Parliament.

Since 2015, revenues raised from VAT charges on tampons and pads have been used to fund charities that aid vulnerable women.

More than £62million has been allocated since the scheme was launched.

Campaigners welcomed the announcement that the tampon tax will be scrapped.

However, concerns have been expressed that the Treasury is not planning to replace the tampon tax fund with other investment.

Rose Caldwell, CEO of Plan International UK, a humanitarian charity, said: 'Today’s scrapping of the tampon tax is a landmark moment in the fight against period poverty, and it comes not a moment too soon.

'The cost of period products remains one of the leading causes of period poverty alongside period stigma and a lack of education for young people about periods.'

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Mail Online

News

Chancellor unveils biggest Budget splurge since 1992 - but can he balance the books? UK debt is set to hit £2TRILLION as Rishi Sunak stokes borrowing to boost the economy amid coronavirus crisis

James Tapsfield, Political Editor For Mailonline
7,300 words
11 March 2020
19:08
Mail Online
DAMONL
English
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* Chancellor Rishi Sunak has unveiled a huge spending spree in his first Budget

* Mr Sunak said he will pump money into coronavirus response and services

* OBR says national debt will hit £2tn in 2024 and borrowing will rise sharply

* Mr Sunak's first financial package included funding to boost UK's infrastructure

* Fuel duty was frozen for the tenth year running and national insurance cut

* Health minister Nadine Dorries becomes first MP to test positive for coronavirus

* The Bank of England this morning moved to slash interest rate by 0.5% to 0.25%

UK debt is set to hit £2trillion after the Chancellor went on an extraordinary spending spree in the Budget.

Rishi Sunak announced a massive splurge to boost the economy ahead of the looming coronavirus crisis.

The £30billion bonanza, including £12billion to respond to an outbreak that could ramp up within days, is the biggest loosening since Norman Lamont was in No11 in 1992.

The government's own watchdog said the measures will reverse a decade of austerity, and be funded mainly by borrowing.

There is also a significant risk that the fiscal situation will end up being much worse, as the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts do not take account of the looming hit from coronavirus.

[related]

[item name=video id=4178882 style=2 /]

The OBR's report said borrowing will be £125billion higher over the next five years as a result of the policies. Although taxes will rise moderately as corporation tax cuts have been delayed, the extra revenue will be dwarfed by new outlays.

The national debt will crest the £2trillion mark in 2024-25, according to its estimates.

The OBR said spending on public services was returning to the same level per person as before austerity levels.

'As regards current spending, the Budget completes the reversal of the cuts to real departmental spending per person undertaken by the Coalition Government,' it said.

'The turnaround started in the Conservative Government's post-election Budget in July 2015, but really took hold with the multi-billion pound NHS settlement in June 2018.

'The capital spending turnaround is more dramatic still – the Coalition Government's early cuts (which had been a feature of the previous Labour Government's March 2010 Budget plans) will have been almost fully reversed this year. Spending is set to be around a third higher at the end of our forecast than in 2010-11.'

The OBR said the government 'is content to borrow significant sums on an ongoing basis'. The Budget measures will push up government debt by £125billion over the next five years, according to the watchdog.

'The Government has proposed the largest sustained fiscal loosening since the pre-election Budget of March 1992 (which was reversed within months after the UK left the European exchange rate mechanism in September that year).

'Relative to our pre-measures baseline forecast, the Government's policy decisions increase the budget deficit by 0.9 per cent of GDP on average over the next five years and add £125billion (4.6 per cent of GDP) to public sector net debt by 2024-25.'

The OBR said it expects growth to fall to 1.1 per cent this year, down from 1.4 per cent last year.

The 2020 growth forecast is sharply lower than its previous prediction of 1.4 per cent and marks the weakest expansion since the 2009 recession after the financial crisis, when the economy contracted by 4.2 per cent.

The OBR forecasts do not fully take into account the impact of the coronavirus outbreak, having only factored in a knock to growth of 0.1 percentage points.

The watchdog said: 'It has become clear that the spread of coronavirus will be far wider than assumed in our central forecast, pointing to a deeper - and possibly more prolonged - slowdown.'

The respected IFS think-tank pointed out that funding for public services is now expected to rise by 2.8 per cent on top of inflation. Director Paul Johnson said: 'With investment spending rising even faster, something has to give.'

Under the Budget package, the NHS and other public services will get a £5billion emergency coronavirus response fund, with Mr Sunak vowing he 'will go further if necessary'.

In a huge £2billion bailout, ministers are footing the sick pay bill for up to two million small and medium sized businesses, covering the 14 days of a quarantine period.

Half of businesses will pay no rates for the next year to help them weather the storm - with pubs benefiting from a freeze in alcohol duties to step them going under while millions of people are having to self-isolate. Job seekers will no longer have to attend job centre to get benefits.

Mr Sunak said in total the £12billion for coronavirus, plus a splurge on other big-ticket items including a tax cut for millions of workers, amounted to a £30billion 'fiscal stimulus', and would boost economic growth by 0.5 per cent over the next two years.

Despite a bewildering array of high-spending policies - which effectively unwind a decade of austerity - he stated that the government will still be on track to meet its borrowing and debt rules.

Spending per person now back to pre-austerity levels, says watchdog

Spending per person is returning to pre-austerity levels after the Chancellor's Budget splurge, the government's watchdog said today.

The financial package represents the biggest loosening of the purse strings since 1992, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

'As regards current spending, the Budget completes the reversal of the cuts to real departmental spending per person undertaken by the Coalition Government,' it said.

'The turnaround started in the Conservative Government's post-election Budget in July 2015, but really took hold with the multi-billion pound NHS settlement in June 2018.

'The capital spending turnaround is more dramatic still – the Coalition Government's early cuts (which had been a feature of the previous Labour Government's March 2010 Budget plans) will have been almost fully reversed this year. Spending is set to be around a third higher at the end of our forecast than in 2010-11.'

The OBR said the government 'is content to borrow significant sums on an ongoing basis'. The Budget measures will push up government debt by £125billion over the next five years, according to the watchdog.

In its report on the Budget - which was prepared to late to factor in the latest impact from coronavirus - the watchdog said: 'The Government has proposed the largest sustained fiscal loosening since the pre-election Budget of March 1992 (which was reversed within months after the UK left the European exchange rate mechanism in September that year).

'Relative to our pre-measures baseline forecast, the Government's policy decisions increase the budget deficit by 0.9 per cent of GDP on average over the next five years and add £125billion (4.6 per cent of GDP) to public sector net debt by 2024-25.'

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In a stirring message to the country on the coronavirus threat, Mr Sunak said: 'We will get through this together.

'The British people may be worried but they are not daunted.'

He added: 'This virus is the key challenge facing our country today... it's going to be tough but I'm confident that our economic performance will recover.'

The Budget comes the shadow of mounting global turmoil over coronavirus, with Italy effectively in lockdown and the risk that the situation could spiral in the rest of Europe. The Bank of England this morning slashed its key interest rate by half a per cent to 0.25 per cent.

The crisis was dramatically brought home to politicians overnight as health minister Nadine Dorries became the first MP to test positive, days after attending a reception at No10 with Boris Johnson.

Some are thought to have stayed away from the set-piece today amid fears of contagion in the packed chamber. However, the PM has insisted he does not need to be tested as he has no symptoms, and was not within two metres of his minister at the reception.

Despite tackling coronavirus being at the heart of the Budget, Mr Sunak also insisted the government has not abandoned its determination to 'level up' the country after Brexit.

In a flurry of spending commitments, Mr Sunak declared that millions of workers will get a tax cut, as the national insurance threshold will go up to £9,500 this year. After intense lobbying from Tory MPs, fuel duty will also be frozen for the tenth year running.

Former PM Theresa May urged restraint as she reacted to the Budget today.

She told MPs: 'Generally speaking, prime ministers want to spend money and chancellors want to manage the public finances prudently.'

Tory former chancellor Sajid Javid, sitting behind Mrs May, could be heard joking: 'So true.'

'So while spending a lot of money may be popular and may seem the natural thing to do, there is of course that necessity of having a realistic assessment of the longer-term impact of those decisions, the longer-term consequences, and a necessity to ensure that we have that restraint and caution that enables us to make the public finances continue to be strong into the future.'

Mrs May said the spending measures designed to respond to the coronavirus outbreak were only possible because of the 'sound management' of public finances by Conservative governments.

War on coronavirus: Rishi Sunak hands NHS a blank cheque, increases sick pay for millions, and gives business huge tax breaks

Rishi Sunak today unveiled a massive £30billion bonanza to stop coronavirus plunging Britain into Italy-style chaos - as he effectively reversed a decade of austerity.

Delivering his crucial first Budget, the Chancellor admitted that people were 'worried' and the killer disease will inevitably have a major impact on the economy.

But he insisted the government will do 'everything it can' to keep the country 'healthy and financially secure', saying Britain will 'get through this'.

The NHS and other public services will get a £5billion emergency response fund, with Mr Sunak vowing he 'will go further if necessary'.

In a huge £2billion bailout, ministers are footing the sick pay bill for up to two million small and medium sized businesses, covering the 14 days of a quarantine period.

Half of businesses will pay no rates for the next year to help them weather the storm - with pubs benefiting from a freeze in alcohol duties to step them going under while millions of people are having to self-isolate. Job seekers will no longer have to attend job centre to get benefits.

Mr Sunak said in total the £12billion for coronavirus, plus a splurge on other big-ticket items including a tax cut for millions of workers, amounted to a £30billion 'fiscal stimulus', and would boost economic growth by 0.5 per cent over the next two years.

Despite a bewildering array of high-spending policies - which effectively unwind a decade of austerity - he stated that the government will still be on track to meet its borrowing and debt rules.

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But the respected IFS think-tank pointed out that funding for public services is now expected to rise by 2.8 per cent on top of inflation. Director Paul Johnson said: 'With investment spending rising even faster, something has to give.'

The government's independent watchdog, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), said borrowing would be £125billion higher over the next five years as a result of the policies.

In a stirring message to the country on the coronavirus threat, Mr Sunak said: 'We will get through this together.

'The British people may be worried but they are not daunted.'

He added: 'This virus is the key challenge facing our country today... it's going to be tough but I'm confident that our economic performance will recover.'

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Despite tackling coronavirus being at the heart of the Budget, Mr Sunak also insisted the government has not abandoned its determination to 'level up' the country after Brexit.

In a flurry of spending commitments, Mr Sunak declared that millions of workers will get a tax cut, as the national insurance threshold will go up to £9,500 this year. After intense lobbying from Tory MPs, fuel duty will also be frozen for the tenth year running.

The move is designed to combat the 'economic shock' which is now expected to be caused by coronavirus.

In a wide-ranging package that puts Britain on a coronavirus war footing, Mr Sunak announced:

* A £1 billion business rates holiday for retail, leisure and hospitality firms with a rateable value of under £51,000

* The Government will fully meet the cost of providing statutory sick pay for up to 14 days for workers in firms with up to 250 employees, providing over £2 billion for up to two million businesses.

* Reforms to the benefits system to make it easier to access funds will provide a £500 million boost to the welfare system, along with a £500 million hardship fund

* A £3,000 cash grant to businesses eligible for small business rates relief

* Alcohol duties will be frozen along with fuel duty;

* The lifetime limit for entrepreneurs' relief will be cut from £10million to £1million, but it will not be abolished;

* Treasury offices will be established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and there will be a new 'economic campus' in the north of England;

Mr Sunak told MPs: 'I know how worried people are. Worried about their health, the health of their loved ones, their jobs, their income, their businesses, their financial security.

'And I know they get even more worried when they turn on their TVs and hear talk of markets collapsing and difficult times coming.

'People want to know what is happening and what can be done to fix it. What everyone needs to know is we are doing everything we can to keep this country and our people healthy and financially secure.

Backlash over 'glaring omission' of social care from Budget

Ministers are facing a cross-party backlash over the lack of action on social care in the Budget.

Boris Johnson pledged to find a way through the impasse over policy before the election.

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However, no plan has yet emerged, with Health Secretary Matt Hancock writing a round-robin letter to MPs and peers last week asking for suggestions.

Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said the lack of extra funding for social care was a 'glaring omission' in Rishi Sunak's Budget.

Despite praising a 'great first outing' for the Chancellor, Mr Hunt added: 'Hospitals will continue to fill up & winter crises will be annual until we fix this issue, which - I fully accept - wasn't solved when I was in office.'

He added: 'We desperately need a social care long-term plan to go alongside the NHS plan.'

Labour MP Jess Phillips tweeted: 'Plenty to be pleased about in budget, missing Social Care is so bad.

'Truth is that they know it has to be paid for but they cannot bear to be honest about it.

'Imagine you had a majority of 80, you could do what you wanted and you didn't do social care its honestly baffling to me.'

'We are clear that this is above party. We will do right by you and your family and I know I will have the support of the whole House as I say that.'

Mr Sunak said statutory sick pay will be available for 'all those who are advised to self-isolate' even if they have not displayed symptoms.

There will be reforms to the benefits system to make it easier to access funds will provide a £500million boost to the welfare system, along with a £500million hardship fund

Mr Sunak said: 'Those on contributory employment and support allowance will be able to claim from day one instead of day eight to make sure that time spent off work due to sickness is reflected in your benefits.

'I'm also temporarily removing the minimum income floor in Universal Credit.'

The Chancellor said that the Government will meet the cost for businesses with fewer than 250 employees of providing statutory sick pay to those off work 'due to coronavirus'.

Mr Sunak said a 'temporary coronavirus business interruption loan scheme' will be introduced for banks to offer loans of up to £1.2million to support small and medium-sized businesses.

From the coming year the government will take the 'exceptional step' of abolishing business rates for businesses with a rateable value below £51,000.

'Any eligible retail, leisure or hospitality business with a rateable value below £51,000 will, over the next financial year, pay no business rates whatsoever,' he said.

'That is a tax cut worth over £1billion, saving each business up to £25,000.'

Mr Sunak revealed that fuel duty will remain at 58p per litre for petrol and diesel - maintaining the freeze in place since 2011.

He told the Commons: 'I have heard representations that after nine years of being frozen, at a cost of GBP110 billion to the taxpayer, we can no longer afford to freeze fuel duty.

'I'm certainly mindful of the fiscal cost and the environmental impacts. 'But I'm taking considerable steps in this Budget to incentivise cleaner forms of transportation, and many people still rely on their cars. 'So I'm pleased to announce today that for another year fuel duty will remain frozen. Compared to 2010 plans, that's a saving of £1,200.'

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Cheers! Chancellor FREEZES tax on beer, wine AND cider in major budget boost to stop pubs shutting during coronavirus crisis

Drinkers will be raising a glass to Rishi Sunak after he stepped away from increasing booze taxes in the Budget today.

The Chancellor said he was abandoning a planned rise in duty on spirits and would freeze the rates on beer, cider and wine as well.

The announcement was one of a slew of announcements designed to help Britain's under-pressure High Streets and pubs as they struggle against an expected major coronavirus slowdown in the economy.

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The duty freeze is only the second time almost two decades that the Treasury has avoided using drinking as a way to boost its coffers with a rate rise.

Mr Sunak told the Commons: 'Pubs are at the centre of community life but too many have closed over the past decade.

'For only the second time in almost 20 years that is every single one of our alcohol duties frozen.'

Dayalan Nayager, managing director of Diageo Great Britain, Ireland & France, said: 'Drinkers across the country will raise a toast to the Chancellor tonight.

'The Government's measures to help the hospitality and retail sectors will also be a welcome move for our customers, their employees and consumers in general.'

Mr Sunak has been lobbied by distillers to cut or freeze rates.

The UK Spirits Alliance pointed out that drinkers can pay more than £10 in alcohol duty and VAT on a £14 bottle of hard liquor, and charities are lobbying for the tax to be increased further, on health grounds.

But a spokesman for the trade body, speaking before the Budget UK Spirits Alliance, said: 'Lowering spirits duty has proven to deliver more jobs, more cash for the Treasury and economic growth across the country.'

'Blue sky' research body hailed by Dominic Cummings gets £800m in Budget

A new science and research body championed by Dominic Cummings will receive at least £800 million from the Government, the Chancellor has announced.

Rishi Sunak said the sum would go towards a “new blues-skies funding agency” modelled on the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Arpa) in America.

It comes after the Conservatives pledged in their election manifesto to invest millions in a new research institution.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s aide Mr Cummings has long been a supporter of the scheme, advocating for it in a number of blog posts.

In a recent post he described his recruitment strategy for Government advisers, saying officials were “hiring data scientists, project managers, policy experts, assorted weirdos”.

Blue-skies research is science that explores new ideas which do not yet have any obvious real-world applications.

The Budget announced on Wednesday said the agency “will fund high-risk, high-reward science”.

Mr Sunak also said investment in research and development would be increased to £22 billion per year by 2024-25.

He revealed that over the next 10 years more than £1 billion would go to the animal health science facility at Weybridge in Surrey.

He said: “I’m investing £1.4 billion in our world-leading science institute at Weybridge where, as we speak, they’re working to analyse samples of coronavirus.

“To secure our leadership in the technologies of the future, I’m investing over £900 million in nuclear fusion, space and electric vehicles.

“And as we invest in ideas, we’re also changing the way we fund science in this country.

“I can confirm that we will invest at least £800 million in a new blues-skies funding agency here in the UK.”

The Budget also sets out £180 million over six years for a state-of-the-art storage and research facility for the Natural History Museum at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.

The upgrade will put the facility at the forefront of natural sciences research and international collaboration, housing and increasing access to around 40% of a world-leading biological collection.

Government will REFUND coronavirus-related sick pay for ALL small and medium-sized firms for up to 14 days as Chancellor reveals a £2bn fighting fund to keep companies afloat

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Rishi Sunak handed small and medium-sized businesses a coronavirus lifeline today as he said the government will cover the cost of sick pay linked to the deadly outbreak.

The Chancellor used his Budget to announce a fighting fund worth more than £2 billion which firms with fewer than 250 employees will be able to access.

Companies will be able to claim refunds for sick pay paid to any staff who are off work because of coronavirus for a period of up to 14 days.

Meanwhile, Mr Sunak also announced that statutory sick pay will be extended so that it applies from day one of an illness rather than from day four.

Statutory sick pay will also be made available to 'all those who are advised to self-isolate' because of coronavirus even if they have not displayed symptoms.

The announcements represent a major intervention by the government as it tries to stop disruption caused by coronavirus from sinking British businesses.

'For only the second time in almost 20 years that is every single one of our alcohol duties frozen.'

Dayalan Nayager, managing director of Diageo Great Britain, Ireland & France, said: 'Drinkers across the country will raise a toast to the Chancellor tonight.

'The Government's measures to help the hospitality and retail sectors will also be a welcome move for our customers, their employees and consumers in general.'

Business rates will be SCRAPPED for thousands of smaller firms amid coronavirus crisis

Business rates will be scrapped for thousands of small businesses over the next year.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that businesses such as shops, cinemas, restaurants and music venues with a rateable value under £51,000 will not have to pay the tax for the next financial year.

The Government previously announced that these businesses were due to receive a 50% discount for the year, up from a previous discount of 33 per cent.

It said it will also extend the removal of rates to leisure, retail and hospitality businesses who previously were ineligible for a discount, such as museums, art galleries, and theatres; Caravan parks and gyms; Small hotels and B&Bs; sports clubs, night clubs; club houses, guest houses.

Mr Sunak said: 'That means any eligible retail, leisure or hospitality business with a rateable value below £51,000 will, over the next financial year, pay no business rates whatsoever. That is a tax cut worth over £1 billion, saving each business up to £25,000.

'And it means, over the next 12 months, nearly half of all business properties in England will not pay a penny of business rates.'

He also told ministers that it would increase the current business rates discount to pubs, which have a rateable value below £100,000, from £1,000 to £5,000.

The Government also announced £2.1 billion would be made available for grants of £3,000 for any business which qualifies for small business rates relief.

Mr Sunak also launched a 'fundamental review' into the long-term future of business rates, to be concluded at the autumn Budget. The Government previously said it would launch a review into the rates system.

Rates bills are based on a complicated formula which involves analysis by Government inspectors into rental values of all business premises in England and Wales, raising around £40 billion a year for the Treasury.

Last week, organisations including the Association of Convenience Stores, British Chambers of Commerce, British Property Federation and Federation of Small Businesses all called on the Chancellor for a major overhaul of the current rates system.

It followed a separate letter signed by more than 50 retail bosses, including leaders at Asda, B&Q, Greggs and Ann Summers, urging for the current system to be replaced.

Tampon tax abolished: Rishi Sunak announces charge will be scrapped in January next year when EU rules no longer apply to the UK

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Rishi Sunak today announced he will abolish the so-called tampon tax from January next year when the UK no longer has to follow EU rules.

Laws made in Brussels have meant Britain has been unable to scrap VAT on women's sanitary products despite growing calls and mounting pressure from campaigners.

But Mr Sunak said the UK's departure from the bloc means Britain will soon be able to set its own policy on the matter.

Delivering his first Budget as Chancellor, Mr Sunak told the House of Commons: 'I can also confirm now that we have left the EU that I will abolish the tampon tax.

'From January next year there will be no VAT whatsoever on women's sanitary products.

'And I congratulate all members and right honorable members who campaigned for this.'

The UK and Brussels are currently in a Brexit 'standstill' transition period during which the former has agreed to follow EU rules.

That transition period will end on December 31. Mr Sunak's announcement means the UK will scrap the tampon tax as soon as it is free to diverge from EU regulations.

Existing EU law has prevented member states from reducing the VAT rate on sanitary products below five per cent.

That means tampons and pads are technically classed as luxury items and not essentials.

The Treasury estimates removing VAT from the products will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Critics have long criticised the tax for contributing to 'period poverty', where sanitary products are pushed out of reach because of their cost.

Tampons and towels have been subject to five different tax rates since 1973.

The UK first introduced VAT in 1973, with a standard rate of 10 per cent applied to sanitary products.

In 1974, standard VAT was cut to eight per cent, before rising to 15 per cent in 1979 and 17.5 per cent in 1991.

The Government moved sanitary products to a reduced rate of five per cent in January 2001 following a campaign and debates in Parliament.

Since 2015, revenues raised from VAT charges on tampons and pads have been used to fund charities that aid vulnerable women.

More than £62million has been allocated since the scheme was launched.

Campaigners welcomed the announcement that the tampon tax will be scrapped.

However, concerns have been expressed that the Treasury is not planning to replace the tampon tax fund with other investment.

Rose Caldwell, CEO of Plan International UK, a humanitarian charity, said: 'Today's scrapping of the tampon tax is a landmark moment in the fight against period poverty, and it comes not a moment too soon.

'The cost of period products remains one of the leading causes of period poverty alongside period stigma and a lack of education for young people about periods.'

Britain's flood defences bolstered with £5billion after storm misery

Britain's flood-battered regions are to receive a £5billion boost in the Budget as Boris Johnson's Government ramps up its spending on high-profile infrastructure projects.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced 336,000 properties in England will benefit from a doubling to £5.2 billion by 2024 of money for flood defences.

The announcement about the boost for flood-hit areas comes after a winter in which the UK has been battered by some of the worst storms in recent memory.

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Communities struggling to recover from the damage will be able to claim from a £120 million Winter Defence Fund designed to repair flood defences as quickly as possible.

Mr Sunak said: 'It's going to pay for over 2000 different flood schemes around the country, it's going to protect over 300,000 homes.

'We have all either in our constituencies as MPs or watching on TV seeing the devastation wreaked on communities by flooding, this will make an enormous difference to people's lives and I think it's absolutely the right thing to do and this is something that wherever you live, whether you are in the south-west or the north-east, this impacts you, this investment will make a difference.'

Chancellor Rishi Sunak devotes £2.5billion to the war on potholes

Rishi Sunak unveiled a multibillion-pound drive to 'eradicate the scourge' of potholes throughout the country.

The Chancellor used his Budget speech today to pledge to spend £2.5billion on repairing 50million potholes over the next five years.

Drivers have been annoyed in recent years about disruptive works caused by building cycle and bus lanes while roads has worsened.

Mr Sunak said the pothole money will be targeted at the South West, the North West and the east of England. The first half a billion will be spent this year.

The Treasury said action is needed to improve infrastructure and deal with a situation where 90 per cent of insurance claims are related to pothole damage.

The Chancellor said: 'We can't level up Britain and spread opportunity if we are spending our journeys dodging potholes and forking out for the damage they cause.

'It's vital we keep roads in good condition. That's why we are going to eradicate the scourge of potholes in every part of the country.

'This funding will fill millions of potholes every year – speeding up journeys, reducing vehicle damage and making our roads safer.'

Mr Sunak said funding will also be available for local authorities to undertake long-term road resurfacing works to prevent potholes from appearing.

Luke Bosdet, of the AA, said tackling potholes was welcome but warned it must not be focused solely on major routes, leaving minor roads and residential streets 'plagued' by potholes.

But shadow chancellor John McDonnell branded the move a gimmick. He said the 'Tories are repeating their mistake of the last 10 years' by focusing on a 'gimmicky grab-bag of projects' which will only disappoint.

Chancellor vows £100m to make streets safer in Budget

Rishi Sunak used today's Budget to 'toughen up community sentences' to make Britain's streets safer.

The Chancellor set aside £100million to bolster the probation service and support victims of rape and sexual assault.

Convicted criminals released from prison on licence half-way through their sentences will face tighter constraints, including stricter curfews.

And offenders known to commit crimes after drinking will be fitted with so-called 'sobriety tags', which monitor their location and sample skin perspiration to determine whether they have consumed alcohol.

Mr Sunak promised 'new funding to toughen up community sentences, crack down on domestic abuse and provide victims with the support they need', as a cross-party group of MPs called for a major investment in youth services to help prevent knife crime and protect children from a life of crime and violence.

Ministers pledge £5billion of loans to boost post-Brexit exports

The Chancellor is preparing to boost post-Brexit exports for UK businesses by making £5billion of loans available in his forthcoming Budget.

Rishi Sunak is set to hand over £5billion to UK Export Finance (Ukef), the Government's export credit agency that provides loans to overseas buyers of British goods and services.

The Treasury said the money would help UK exporters to increase their global sales as Britain prepares for life outside the European Union, with the Chancellor helping to top up the purchasing power of those abroad by providing a competitive loan rate through Ukef.

The agency's role is to ensure exports do not fail due to a lack of available finance or insurance for those looking to buy up Britain's export offers.

It will be the largest increase ever handed to the Ukef, taking its lending power up from £3billion to £8billion.

Mr Sunak said: 'This decade will provide even more opportunities for British businesses to export and trade with new partners across the world.

'The Government will support business to seize these opportunities and thrive on the world stage.

'This package - which is the highest level of export lending the Government has ever made available - will provide support to industries and regions across the country.'

From the £5billion pot being made available, £2billion will be offered for exports that encourage green growth while £1 billion will be set aside for defence industry purchases, Number 11 confirmed.

As part of the extra funding, foreign investors hoping to start a business in the UK are also expected to have their visa applications supported by the Department for International Trade

Fuel duty frozen for tenth consecutive year as reluctant Chancellor concedes that 'many people still rely on their cars'

Fuel duty has been frozen for the tenth year in a row, the Chancellor has confirmed.

Rishi Sunak announced in today's Budget statement that the taxation on petrol and diesel will remain at 57.95p per litre, as it has since March 2011.

He told the Commons: 'I have heard representations that after nine years of being frozen, at a cost of £110 billion to the taxpayer, we can no longer afford to freeze fuel duty,' though conceded that it would remain unchanged because motorists are still heavily reliant on their cars.

The Budget document has also confirmed that the Plug-In Car Grant subsidising the purchase price of a new electric car has been extended to 2022-23.

'I'm certainly mindful of the fiscal cost and the environmental impacts,' he said in his statement.

'But I'm taking considerable steps in this Budget to incentivise cleaner forms of transportation, and many people still rely on their cars.

'So I'm pleased to announce today that for another year fuel duty will remain frozen.

'Compared to 2010 plans, that's a saving of £1,200.'

Fears had grown that Mr Sunak would end the freeze in a bid to convince more drivers to switch to greener electric vehicles.

Environmental groups had heaped pressure on the Chancellor to increase fuel duty to show the Government was serious about tackling climate change.

AA president Edmund King said the motoring group was pleased the Chancellor had listened to his calls to maintain the freeze in fuel duty, as an increase would have had a negative impact on both households and business at a time when 'the economy is fragile given the current circumstances'.

Nicholas Lyes, head of policy at automotive services firm RAC, said the decision was welcomed and will be a 'relief to drivers up and down the country'.

'While the Chancellor might have been tempted to increase duty, the reality is that for millions this would have simply increased their everyday driving costs and done nothing to encourage them to switch to cleaner vehicles,' he added.

'And while many want to seek alternative transport options to using their vehicles for some journeys, in so many parts of the country reasonable public transport provision simply does not exist.'

Steve Gooding, director of motoring research charity RAC Foundation, said: 'The Chancellor clearly recognised that the coronavirus is creating unprecedented health and economic uncertainties, and that

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because transport is the single biggest area of household expenditure, any move to increase this burden would hit drivers' wallets hard, especially those on lower incomes.'

Howard Cox, who has campaigned for the fuel duty freeze to be retained said the 'rookie Chancellor' had listened to common sense.

The founder of FairFuel UK added: 'This Government must recognise, that drivers do not want to be seen just as environmental pariahs and perennial easy cash cows.

'We must put money back into consumer spending, free up roads congestion and incentivise drivers to move to cleaner fuels and practical solutions to help lower emissions, without the threat of ineffective vehicle bans and regressive pay to pollute taxes.

'Any thought of future tax increases on hard pressed motorists, will result in a Drivers Rebellion. Well done Chancellor, that for the moment is postponed.'

The cost implication to the Treasury of freezing fuel duty could be recovered through the end of a tax relief on red diesel.

The Chancellor said in two year's time the lower 11p tax on the fuel would be removed for all but the rail, home heating and agricultural sectors.

This would mean an extra £5billion for the Treasury between 2022 and 2025.

The Budget document also revealed there will be a new consultation on plans to change how VED in calculated for drivers, which could see it again more closely linked to CO2 emissions.

Budget confirms £5billion funding for rollout of faster broadband

Fighting fund to reduce rough sleeping

A fighting fund to reduce rough sleeping is expected to be one of Rishi Sunak's main announcements at the Budget.

The Chancellor will unveil a package of investment worth an estimated £643 million.

The cash will be used to help homeless people to get off the streets and to support them to get their lives back on track.

The Tories have been repeatedly hammered by Labour over rising homelessness in recent years and Boris Johnson said in February the current situation was 'totally unacceptable'.

The government has previously announced a £236 million fund to tackle homelessness with rough sleeping in England having more than doubled over the past ten years.

Mr Johnson said last month: 'The number of people sleeping rough in our country is way too high. It is true that they have been coming down in the last year or so, but we want to drive that forward now.

'We want to make a big, big dent in those numbers.'

A £5billion investment to roll out faster broadband across the UK by 2025 was confirmed by the Chancellor in today's Budget.

The Conservatives pledged at the general election to bring full fibre and gigabit-capable broadband to every home and business in Britain within five years.

Rishi Sunak has confirmed the cash injection which he hopes will benefit more than five million homes and businesses.

Gigabit broadband, which is 40 times faster than standard superfast broadband, will be rolled out to the hardest to reach 20 per cent of the country, the Treasury has already announced.

The Chancellor is also expected to announce a £1 billion deal with the mobile phone industry to boost 4G coverage across the country - with the biggest improvements likely to be in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The deal will provide extra coverage to 280,000 premises and 16,000km of roads, the Treasury anticipates.

Mr Sunak said: 'We are committed to levelling up across every region and nation in the UK and that is why we are making the largest ever public investment into broadband.

'This investment delivers on our promises to the British people, boosting growth and prosperity across the country.'

Parents of sick babies will get £160 a week extra so they can focus on crisis

Parents of sick newborn babies will be able to claim a new neonatal pay and leave entitlement under measures set to be announced by the Chancellor at today's Budget.

Rishi Sunak will outline plans to allow new mothers and fathers to claim statutory paid leave for every week their child is in neonatal care, up to a maximum of 12 weeks, when he delivers his first Budget on Wednesday.

Treasury Minister Kemi Badenoch said the cost of the leave - to be paid at a rate of around £160 per week - would almost entirely be incurred by the government, rather than business.

She said: 'This week's Budget is about many things. It will deliver on the promises we made to the British people in last year's election campaign. And it will lay the foundations for the next decade of UK economic growth. What it will also do is deliver support to hard-working families.

'And for families who are unlucky enough to spend the first period of their child's life in neonatal care it will bring particularly good news. Because the Chancellor will announce that for the first time ever parents in these difficult circumstances will be able to claim a new neonatal pay and leave entitlement.

'We will bring in an historic new entitlement ensuring parents having to take time off work because they have a sick baby will get paid parental leave.'

Cuts to National Insurance could benefit millions of workers

A National Insurance cut was one of the centrepieces of Rishi Sunak's first Budget.

The Conservatives pledged in their 2019 general election manifesto to slash the amount people have to pay.

Mr Sunak has increased the threshold at which payments start from £8,632 to £9,500 with the change coming into effect next month.

Ultimately the Tories want to increase the threshold to £12,500 over the next five years.

Today's move will save workers approximately £100 a year.

The Tory manifesto stated: 'We not only want to freeze taxes, but to cut them too. We will raise the National Insurance threshold to £9,500 next year – representing a tax cut for 31 million workers. Our ultimate ambition is to ensure that the first £12,500 you earn is completely free of tax – which would put almost £500 per year in people's pockets.'

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Mail Online

News

Chancellor's £30BILLION war on coronavirus: Rishi Sunak hands NHS a blank cheque, increases sick pay for millions, and gives business huge tax breaks... but where is all the money coming from?

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* Chancellor Rishi Sunak is delivering his Budget as he prepares the UK to fight a major coronavirus outbreak

* Chancellor has announced that he is pumping billions of pounds into propping up business and the NHS

* Conservative health minister Nadine Dorries has become the first MP to test positive for the killer disease

* The Bank of England this morning moved to slash key interest rate by 0.5% to 0.25% to boost the economy

* Mr Sunak's first financial package includes a big injection of funding to boost the UK's core infrastructure

* Fuel duty is being frozen for the tenth year running and national insurance tax cut is being reduced

Rishi Sunak today unveiled a massive £30billion bonanza to stop coronavirus plunging Britain into Italy-style chaos - as he effectively reversed a decade of austerity.

Delivering his crucial first Budget, the Chancellor admitted that people were 'worried' and the killer disease will inevitably have a major impact on the economy.

But he insisted the government will do 'everything it can' to keep the country 'healthy and financially secure', saying Britain will 'get through this'.

The NHS and other public services will get a £5billion emergency response fund, with Mr Sunak vowing he 'will go further if necessary'.

In a huge £2billion bailout, ministers are footing the sick pay bill for up to two million small and medium sized businesses, covering the 14 days of a quarantine period.

Half of businesses will pay no rates for the next year to help them weather the storm - with pubs benefiting from a freeze in alcohol duties to step them going under while millions of people are having to self-isolate. Job seekers will no longer have to attend job centre to get benefits.

Mr Sunak said in total the £12billion for coronavirus, plus a splurge on other big-ticket items including a tax cut for millions of workers, amounted to a £30billion 'fiscal stimulus', and would boost economic growth by 0.5 per cent over the next two years.

Despite a bewildering array of high-spending policies - which effectively unwind a decade of austerity - he stated that the government will still be on track to meet its borrowing and debt rules.

But the respected IFS think-tank pointed out that funding for public services is now expected to rise by 2.8 per cent on top of inflation. Director Paul Johnson said: 'With investment spending rising even faster, something has to give.'

The government's independent watchdog, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), said borrowing would be £125billion higher over the next five years as a result of the policies.

In a stirring message to the country on the coronavirus threat, Mr Sunak said: 'We will get through this together.

'The British people may be worried but they are not daunted.'

He added: 'This virus is the key challenge facing our country today... it's going to be tough but I'm confident that our economic performance will recover.'

The Budget comes the shadow of mounting global turmoil over coronavirus, with Italy effectively in lockdown and the risk that the situation could spiral in the rest of Europe. The Bank of England this morning slashed its key interest rate by half a per cent to 0.25 per cent.

The crisis was dramatically brought home to politicians overnight as health minister Nadine Dorries became the first MP to test positive, days after attending a reception at No10 with Boris Johnson.

Some are thought to have stayed away from the set-piece today amid fears of contagion in the packed chamber. However, the PM has insisted he does not need to be tested as he has no symptoms, and was not within two metres of his minister at the reception.

Despite tackling coronavirus being at the heart of the Budget, Mr Sunak also insisted the government has not abandoned its determination to 'level up' the country after Brexit.

In a flurry of spending commitments, Mr Sunak declared that millions of workers will get a tax cut, as the national insurance threshold will go up to £9,500 this year. After intense lobbying from Tory MPs, fuel duty will also be frozen for the tenth year running.

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The move is designed to combat the 'economic shock' which is now expected to be caused by coronavirus.

In a wide-ranging package that puts Britain on a coronavirus war footing, Mr Sunak announced:

* A £1 billion business rates holiday for retail, leisure and hospitality firms with a rateable value of under £51,000

* The Government will fully meet the cost of providing statutory sick pay for up to 14 days for workers in firms with up to 250 employees, providing over £2 billion for up to two million businesses.

* Reforms to the benefits system to make it easier to access funds will provide a £500 million boost to the welfare system, along with a £500 million hardship fund

* A £3,000 cash grant to businesses eligible for small business rates relief

* Alcohol duties will be frozen along with fuel duty;

* The lifetime limit for entrepreneurs' relief will be cut from £10million to £1million, but it will not be abolished;

* Treasury offices will be established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and there will be a new 'economic campus' in the north of England;

Mr Sunak told MPs: 'I know how worried people are. Worried about their health, the health of their loved ones, their jobs, their income, their businesses, their financial security.

'And I know they get even more worried when they turn on their TVs and hear talk of markets collapsing and difficult times coming.

'People want to know what is happening and what can be done to fix it. What everyone needs to know is we are doing everything we can to keep this country and our people healthy and financially secure.

'We are clear that this is above party. We will do right by you and your family and I know I will have the support of the whole House as I say that.'

Mr Sunak said statutory sick pay will be available for 'all those who are advised to self-isolate' even if they have not displayed symptoms.

There will be reforms to the benefits system to make it easier to access funds will provide a £500million boost to the welfare system, along with a £500million hardship fund

Mr Sunak said: 'Those on contributory employment and support allowance will be able to claim from day one instead of day eight to make sure that time spent off work due to sickness is reflected in your benefits.

'I'm also temporarily removing the minimum income floor in Universal Credit.'

The Chancellor said that the Government will meet the cost for businesses with fewer than 250 employees of providing statutory sick pay to those off work 'due to coronavirus'.

Mr Sunak said a 'temporary coronavirus business interruption loan scheme' will be introduced for banks to offer loans of up to £1.2million to support small and medium-sized businesses.

From the coming year the government will take the 'exceptional step' of abolishing business rates for businesses with a rateable value below £51,000.

'Any eligible retail, leisure or hospitality business with a rateable value below £51,000 will, over the next financial year, pay no business rates whatsoever,' he said.

'That is a tax cut worth over £1billion, saving each business up to £25,000.'

Mr Sunak revealed that fuel duty will remain at 58p per litre for petrol and diesel - maintaining the freeze in place since 2011.

He told the Commons: 'I have heard representations that after nine years of being frozen, at a cost of GBP110 billion to the taxpayer, we can no longer afford to freeze fuel duty.

'I'm certainly mindful of the fiscal cost and the environmental impacts. 'But I'm taking considerable steps in this Budget to incentivise cleaner forms of transportation, and many people still rely on their cars. 'So I'm pleased to announce today that for another year fuel duty will remain frozen. Compared to 2010 plans, that's a saving of £1,200.'

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Spending per person now back to pre-austerity levels, says watchdog

Spending per person is returning to pre-austerity levels after the Chancellor's Budget splurge, the government's watchdog said today.

The financial package represents the biggest loosening of the purse strings since 1992, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR).

'As regards current spending, the Budget completes the reversal of the cuts to real departmental spending per person undertaken by the Coalition Government,' it said.

'The turnaround started in the Conservative Government's post-election Budget in July 2015, but really took hold with the multi-billion pound NHS settlement in June 2018.

'The capital spending turnaround is more dramatic still – the Coalition Government's early cuts (which had been a feature of the previous Labour Government's March 2010 Budget plans) will have been almost fully reversed this year. Spending is set to be around a third higher at the end of our forecast than in 2010-11.'

The OBR said the government 'is content to borrow significant sums on an ongoing basis'. The Budget measures will push up government debt by £125billion over the next five years, according to the watchdog.

In its report on the Budget - which was prepared to late to factor in the latest impact from coronavirus - the watchdog said: 'The Government has proposed the largest sustained fiscal loosening since the pre-election Budget of March 1992 (which was reversed within months after the UK left the European exchange rate mechanism in September that year).

'Relative to our pre-measures baseline forecast, the Government's policy decisions increase the budget deficit by 0.9 per cent of GDP on average over the next five years and add £125billion (4.6 per cent of GDP) to public sector net debt by 2024-25.'

Earlier, the Bank of England said in a statement that the decision to cut interest rates had been supported by all nine members of its powerful Monetary Policy Committee and would 'help support businesses and consumer confidence at a difficult time'.

The Chancellor said that without accounting for the impact of coronavirus, the Office for Budget Responsibility has forecast growth of 1.1 per cent in 2020 , 1.8 per cent in 2021 and then 1.5 per cent, 1.3 per cent, and 1.4 per cent in the following years.

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Despite speculation that he would ditch the framework on spending set by predecessor Sajid Javid, Mr Sunak said that his Budget is delivered 'not just within the fiscal rules of the manifesto but with room to spare'.

The entrepreneurs' relief tax break will be scaled back, saving £6 billion over the next five years.

But Mr Sunak said 'most of that money' will go back to firms through a series of other measures: increasing the tax break for research and development expenditure, the structures and building allowance and increasing the employment allowance by a third to £4,000.

The OBR said spending on public services was returning to the same level per person as before austerity levels.

The financial package represents the biggest loosening of the purse strings since 1992.

'As regards current spending, the Budget completes the reversal of the cuts to real departmental spending per person undertaken by the Coalition Government,' it said.

'The turnaround started in the Conservative Government's post-election Budget in July 2015, but really took hold with the multi-billion pound NHS settlement in June 2018.

'The capital spending turnaround is more dramatic still – the Coalition Government's early cuts (which had been a feature of the previous Labour Government's March 2010 Budget plans) will have been almost fully reversed this year. Spending is set to be around a third higher at the end of our forecast than in 2010-11.'

The OBR said the government 'is content to borrow significant sums on an ongoing basis'. The Budget measures will push up government debt by £125billion over the next five years, according to the watchdog.

'The Government has proposed the largest sustained fiscal loosening since the pre-election Budget of March 1992 (which was reversed within months after the UK left the European exchange rate mechanism in September that year).

'Relative to our pre-measures baseline forecast, the Government's policy decisions increase the budget deficit by 0.9 per cent of GDP on average over the next five years and add £125billion (4.6 per cent of GDP) to public sector net debt by 2024-25.'

Mr Sunak was walking the tightrope of showing the UK is prepared for the impact of coronavirus while also demonstrating the government is delivering on its domestic priorities.

Backlash over 'glaring omission' of social care from Budget

Ministers are facing a cross-party backlash over the lack of action on social care in the Budget.

Boris Johnson pledged to find a way through the impasse over policy before the election.

However, no plan has yet emerged, with Health Secretary Matt Hancock writing a round-robin letter to MPs and peers last week asking for suggestions.

Former Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt said the lack of extra funding for social care was a 'glaring omission' in Rishi Sunak's Budget.

Despite praising a 'great first outing' for the Chancellor, Mr Hunt added: 'Hospitals will continue to fill up & winter crises will be annual until we fix this issue, which - I fully accept - wasn't solved when I was in office.'

He added: 'We desperately need a social care long-term plan to go alongside the NHS plan.'

Labour MP Jess Phillips tweeted: 'Plenty to be pleased about in budget, missing Social Care is so bad.

'Truth is that they know it has to be paid for but they cannot bear to be honest about it.

'Imagine you had a majority of 80, you could do what you wanted and you didn't do social care its honestly baffling to me.'

Seeking to show the government is still determined to 'level up' the country after Brexit, Mr Sunak confirmed plans to invest 'record amounts' on improving the UK's key infrastructure like roads, railways and broadband.

Some £600billion will be made available for the infrastructure war chest - treble the typical level of spending which will take public investment to its highest level since the 1950s.

A manifesto pledge to increase the threshold for paying national insurance is being honoured, giving 30 million workers an immediate tax cut of more than £100.

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Alongside freezing fuel duty, £2.5billion will be made available to repair 50 million potholes over the next five years.

Mr Johnson told the Cabinet earlier that the Budget 'starts to tackle head on the challenges facing our economy and country'.

However, the domestic policy announcements are likely to overshadowed by the coronavirus crisis.

Mr Sunak only took over as Chancellor a month ago after the dramatic departure of Sajid Javid during the reshuffle.

And his Budget had to be torn up as the deadly virus spread.

As the outbreak takes grip, advance bookings for hotels, restaurants and bars this summer have halved, according to industry group UK Hospitality.

Some firms are being hit by a shortage of supplies from virus-ravaged China.

Today's Budget measures include allowing firms to defer tax payments in order to improve cash flow.

It also confirmed reforms to statutory sick pay, allowing workers to receive it from the first day of illness rather than the fourth.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said he 'welcomed' the plans to 'head off the impact' of coronavirus.

But he said the extra money for the NHS was 'too little, too late', blaming years of austerity for leaving services 'on their knees'.

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Chancellor promises to plant 'a forest larger than Birmingham' to combat climate change

Rishi Sunak pledged to plant a forest 'larger than Birmingham' under Governbment plans to tackle climate change.

He unveiled plans to plant 30,000 trees and restore 35,000 hectares of peat bog under a £640million scheme to boost carbon capture.

Other steps included including £800 million for developing hubs to help industry and the power sector capture and store their emissions.

He also unveiled a £200 a tonne tax on plastic packaging that does not have at least 30 per cent recycled content and action to support ultra-low emissions vehicles.

The climate change levy businesses pay for gas will be increased and the tax break on polluting red diesel will be removed from 2022, except for uses in agriculture, fish farming, rail and domestic heating.

'This Government intends to be the first in history to leave our natural environment in a better state than we found it,' he told MPs.

It comes in the run-up to key 'Cop26' climate talks in Glasgow in November, with pressure on the Government to show leadership on cutting emissions as countries are expected to up their ambition in tackling global warming.

But Ed Matthew, Cop26 director of the Climate Coalition said the failure of the Budget to put the UK on track to net zero emissions was a 'major concern' ahead of the UN talks.

'A major hole was the failure to confirm funding to insulate and decarbonise homes, a Conservative manifesto pledge. £9 billion of energy efficiency funding seems to have gone missing in Budget action,' he said.

'If the UK cannot get its own house in order it is at risk of crashing the climate talks before they have begun.'

The deputy chief medical officer warned yesterday that the start of the peak of the epidemic was expected within a fortnight.

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Health secretary Matt Hancock chaired a meeting of emergency committee Cobra this afternoon, and Mr Johnson will chair another one tomorrow.

Ministers are considering whether the UK needs to switch formally from trying to contain the virus to a strategy of trying to delay a full-blown epidemic.

This would quickly lead to 'social distancing' measures such as asking employees to work from home and to stay at home if they have even mild cold symptoms. Schools could be closed and mass gatherings banned.

Mr Johnson was today facing growing calls to get tested for coronavirus after Ms Dorries became the first MP diagnosed with the disease.

Ms Dorries has revealed she has put herself into isolation, just days after attending a reception at Number 10 with the PM.

The Tory MP gave a speech in the Commons on Wednesday night, was in the tea rooms with other politicians, and held a surgery on Saturday for 50 of her constituents.

She is believed to have started feeling ill on Thursday, before deteriorating the following day.

Tests confirmed last night that the 62-year-old had the virus and she is now said to be recovering - although she voiced fears for her 84-year-old mother, who is living at her home and 'began coughing' yesterday.

Officials are tracing everyone she has been in contact with since contracting the virus.

Mr Johnson attended a Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey with the Queen on Monday.

Mr Johnson and the Health Secretary Matt Hancock updated Cabinet this morning with the latest information on the outbreak.

Mr Johnson also wished Ms Dorries a 'speedy recovery', noting that she was following official advice to self-isolate.

Cheers! Chancellor FREEZES tax on beer, wine AND cider in major budget boost to stop pubs shutting during coronavirus crisis

Drinkers will be raising a glass to Rishi Sunak after he stepped away from increasing booze taxes in the Budget today.

The Chancellor said he was abandoning a planned rise in duty on spirits and would freeze the rates on beer, cider and wine as well.

The announcement was one of a slew of announcements designed to help Britain's under-pressure High Streets and pubs as they struggle against an expected major coronavirus slowdown in the economy.

The duty freeze is only the second time almost two decades that the Treasury has avoided using drinking as a way to boost its coffers with a rate rise.

Mr Sunak told the Commons: 'Pubs are at the centre of community life but too many have closed over the past decade.

'For only the second time in almost 20 years that is every single one of our alcohol duties frozen.'

Dayalan Nayager, managing director of Diageo Great Britain, Ireland & France, said: 'Drinkers across the country will raise a toast to the Chancellor tonight.

'The Government's measures to help the hospitality and retail sectors will also be a welcome move for our customers, their employees and consumers in general.'

Mr Sunak has been lobbied by distillers to cut or freeze rates.

The UK Spirits Alliance pointed out that drinkers can pay more than £10 in alcohol duty and VAT on a £14 bottle of hard liquor, and charities are lobbying for the tax to be increased further, on health grounds.

But a spokesman for the trade body, speaking before the Budget UK Spirits Alliance, said: 'Lowering spirits duty has proven to deliver more jobs, more cash for the Treasury and economic growth across the country.'

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'Blue sky' research body hailed by Dominic Cummings gets £800m in Budget

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A new science and research body championed by Dominic Cummings will receive at least £800 million from the Government, the Chancellor has announced.

Rishi Sunak said the sum would go towards a “new blues-skies funding agency” modelled on the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Arpa) in America.

It comes after the Conservatives pledged in their election manifesto to invest millions in a new research institution.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s aide Mr Cummings has long been a supporter of the scheme, advocating for it in a number of blog posts.

In a recent post he described his recruitment strategy for Government advisers, saying officials were “hiring data scientists, project managers, policy experts, assorted weirdos”.

Blue-skies research is science that explores new ideas which do not yet have any obvious real-world applications.

The Budget announced on Wednesday said the agency “will fund high-risk, high-reward science”.

Mr Sunak also said investment in research and development would be increased to £22 billion per year by 2024-25.

He revealed that over the next 10 years more than £1 billion would go to the animal health science facility at Weybridge in Surrey.

He said: “I’m investing £1.4 billion in our world-leading science institute at Weybridge where, as we speak, they’re working to analyse samples of coronavirus.

“To secure our leadership in the technologies of the future, I’m investing over £900 million in nuclear fusion, space and electric vehicles.

“And as we invest in ideas, we’re also changing the way we fund science in this country.

“I can confirm that we will invest at least £800 million in a new blues-skies funding agency here in the UK.”

The Budget also sets out £180 million over six years for a state-of-the-art storage and research facility for the Natural History Museum at Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.

The upgrade will put the facility at the forefront of natural sciences research and international collaboration, housing and increasing access to around 40% of a world-leading biological collection.

Government will REFUND coronavirus-related sick pay for ALL small and medium-sized firms for up to 14 days as Chancellor reveals a £2bn fighting fund to keep companies afloat

Rishi Sunak handed small and medium-sized businesses a coronavirus lifeline today as he said the government will cover the cost of sick pay linked to the deadly outbreak.

The Chancellor used his Budget to announce a fighting fund worth more than £2 billion which firms with fewer than 250 employees will be able to access.

Companies will be able to claim refunds for sick pay paid to any staff who are off work because of coronavirus for a period of up to 14 days.

Meanwhile, Mr Sunak also announced that statutory sick pay will be extended so that it applies from day one of an illness rather than from day four.

Statutory sick pay will also be made available to 'all those who are advised to self-isolate' because of coronavirus even if they have not displayed symptoms.

The announcements represent a major intervention by the government as it tries to stop disruption caused by coronavirus from sinking British businesses.

'For only the second time in almost 20 years that is every single one of our alcohol duties frozen.'

Dayalan Nayager, managing director of Diageo Great Britain, Ireland & France, said: 'Drinkers across the country will raise a toast to the Chancellor tonight.

'The Government's measures to help the hospitality and retail sectors will also be a welcome move for our customers, their employees and consumers in general.'

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Business rates will be SCRAPPED for thousands of smaller firms amid coronavirus crisis

Business rates will be scrapped for thousands of small businesses over the next year.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that businesses such as shops, cinemas, restaurants and music venues with a rateable value under £51,000 will not have to pay the tax for the next financial year.

The Government previously announced that these businesses were due to receive a 50% discount for the year, up from a previous discount of 33 per cent.

It said it will also extend the removal of rates to leisure, retail and hospitality businesses who previously were ineligible for a discount, such as museums, art galleries, and theatres; Caravan parks and gyms; Small hotels and B&Bs; sports clubs, night clubs; club houses, guest houses.

Mr Sunak said: 'That means any eligible retail, leisure or hospitality business with a rateable value below £51,000 will, over the next financial year, pay no business rates whatsoever. That is a tax cut worth over £1 billion, saving each business up to £25,000.

'And it means, over the next 12 months, nearly half of all business properties in England will not pay a penny of business rates.'

He also told ministers that it would increase the current business rates discount to pubs, which have a rateable value below £100,000, from £1,000 to £5,000.

The Government also announced £2.1 billion would be made available for grants of £3,000 for any business which qualifies for small business rates relief.

Mr Sunak also launched a 'fundamental review' into the long-term future of business rates, to be concluded at the autumn Budget. The Government previously said it would launch a review into the rates system.

Rates bills are based on a complicated formula which involves analysis by Government inspectors into rental values of all business premises in England and Wales, raising around £40 billion a year for the Treasury.

Last week, organisations including the Association of Convenience Stores, British Chambers of Commerce, British Property Federation and Federation of Small Businesses all called on the Chancellor for a major overhaul of the current rates system.

It followed a separate letter signed by more than 50 retail bosses, including leaders at Asda, B&Q, Greggs and Ann Summers, urging for the current system to be replaced.

Tampon tax abolished: Rishi Sunak announces charge will be scrapped in January next year when EU rules no longer apply to the UK

Rishi Sunak today announced he will abolish the so-called tampon tax from January next year when the UK no longer has to follow EU rules.

Laws made in Brussels have meant Britain has been unable to scrap VAT on women's sanitary products despite growing calls and mounting pressure from campaigners.

But Mr Sunak said the UK's departure from the bloc means Britain will soon be able to set its own policy on the matter.

Delivering his first Budget as Chancellor, Mr Sunak told the House of Commons: 'I can also confirm now that we have left the EU that I will abolish the tampon tax.

'From January next year there will be no VAT whatsoever on women's sanitary products.

'And I congratulate all members and right honorable members who campaigned for this.'

The UK and Brussels are currently in a Brexit 'standstill' transition period during which the former has agreed to follow EU rules.

That transition period will end on December 31. Mr Sunak's announcement means the UK will scrap the tampon tax as soon as it is free to diverge from EU regulations.

Existing EU law has prevented member states from reducing the VAT rate on sanitary products below five per cent.

That means tampons and pads are technically classed as luxury items and not essentials.

The Treasury estimates removing VAT from the products will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Critics have long criticised the tax for contributing to 'period poverty', where sanitary products are pushed out of reach because of their cost.

Tampons and towels have been subject to five different tax rates since 1973.

The UK first introduced VAT in 1973, with a standard rate of 10 per cent applied to sanitary products.

In 1974, standard VAT was cut to eight per cent, before rising to 15 per cent in 1979 and 17.5 per cent in 1991.

The Government moved sanitary products to a reduced rate of five per cent in January 2001 following a campaign and debates in Parliament.

Since 2015, revenues raised from VAT charges on tampons and pads have been used to fund charities that aid vulnerable women.

More than £62million has been allocated since the scheme was launched.

Campaigners welcomed the announcement that the tampon tax will be scrapped.

However, concerns have been expressed that the Treasury is not planning to replace the tampon tax fund with other investment.

Rose Caldwell, CEO of Plan International UK, a humanitarian charity, said: 'Today's scrapping of the tampon tax is a landmark moment in the fight against period poverty, and it comes not a moment too soon.

'The cost of period products remains one of the leading causes of period poverty alongside period stigma and a lack of education for young people about periods.'

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Britain's flood defences bolstered with £5billion after storm misery

Britain's flood-battered regions are to receive a £5billion boost in the Budget as Boris Johnson's Government ramps up its spending on high-profile infrastructure projects.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced 336,000 properties in England will benefit from a doubling to £5.2 billion by 2024 of money for flood defences.

The announcement about the boost for flood-hit areas comes after a winter in which the UK has been battered by some of the worst storms in recent memory.

Communities struggling to recover from the damage will be able to claim from a £120 million Winter Defence Fund designed to repair flood defences as quickly as possible.

Mr Sunak said: 'It's going to pay for over 2000 different flood schemes around the country, it's going to protect over 300,000 homes.

'We have all either in our constituencies as MPs or watching on TV seeing the devastation wreaked on communities by flooding, this will make an enormous difference to people's lives and I think it's absolutely the right thing to do and this is something that wherever you live, whether you are in the south-west or the north-east, this impacts you, this investment will make a difference.'

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Chancellor Rishi Sunak devotes £2.5billion to the war on potholes

Rishi Sunak unveiled a multibillion-pound drive to 'eradicate the scourge' of potholes throughout the country.

The Chancellor used his Budget speech today to pledge to spend £2.5billion on repairing 50million potholes over the next five years.

Drivers have been annoyed in recent years about disruptive works caused by building cycle and bus lanes while roads has worsened.

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Mr Sunak said the pothole money will be targeted at the South West, the North West and the east of England. The first half a billion will be spent this year.

The Treasury said action is needed to improve infrastructure and deal with a situation where 90 per cent of insurance claims are related to pothole damage.

The Chancellor said: 'We can't level up Britain and spread opportunity if we are spending our journeys dodging potholes and forking out for the damage they cause.

'It's vital we keep roads in good condition. That's why we are going to eradicate the scourge of potholes in every part of the country.

'This funding will fill millions of potholes every year – speeding up journeys, reducing vehicle damage and making our roads safer.'

Mr Sunak said funding will also be available for local authorities to undertake long-term road resurfacing works to prevent potholes from appearing.

Luke Bosdet, of the AA, said tackling potholes was welcome but warned it must not be focused solely on major routes, leaving minor roads and residential streets 'plagued' by potholes.

But shadow chancellor John McDonnell branded the move a gimmick. He said the 'Tories are repeating their mistake of the last 10 years' by focusing on a 'gimmicky grab-bag of projects' which will only disappoint.

Chancellor vows £100m to make streets safer in Budget

Rishi Sunak used today's Budget to 'toughen up community sentences' to make Britain's streets safer.

The Chancellor set aside £100million to bolster the probation service and support victims of rape and sexual assault.

Convicted criminals released from prison on licence half-way through their sentences will face tighter constraints, including stricter curfews.

And offenders known to commit crimes after drinking will be fitted with so-called 'sobriety tags', which monitor their location and sample skin perspiration to determine whether they have consumed alcohol.

Mr Sunak promised 'new funding to toughen up community sentences, crack down on domestic abuse and provide victims with the support they need', as a cross-party group of MPs called for a major investment in youth services to help prevent knife crime and protect children from a life of crime and violence.

Ministers pledge £5billion of loans to boost post-Brexit exports

The Chancellor is preparing to boost post-Brexit exports for UK businesses by making £5billion of loans available in his forthcoming Budget.

Rishi Sunak is set to hand over £5billion to UK Export Finance (Ukef), the Government's export credit agency that provides loans to overseas buyers of British goods and services.

The Treasury said the money would help UK exporters to increase their global sales as Britain prepares for life outside the European Union, with the Chancellor helping to top up the purchasing power of those abroad by providing a competitive loan rate through Ukef.

The agency's role is to ensure exports do not fail due to a lack of available finance or insurance for those looking to buy up Britain's export offers.

It will be the largest increase ever handed to the Ukef, taking its lending power up from £3billion to £8billion.

Mr Sunak said: 'This decade will provide even more opportunities for British businesses to export and trade with new partners across the world.

'The Government will support business to seize these opportunities and thrive on the world stage.

'This package - which is the highest level of export lending the Government has ever made available - will provide support to industries and regions across the country.'

From the £5billion pot being made available, £2billion will be offered for exports that encourage green growth while £1 billion will be set aside for defence industry purchases, Number 11 confirmed.

As part of the extra funding, foreign investors hoping to start a business in the UK are also expected to have their visa applications supported by the Department for International Trade

Fuel duty frozen for tenth consecutive year as reluctant Chancellor concedes that 'many people still rely on their cars'

Fuel duty has been frozen for the tenth year in a row, the Chancellor has confirmed.

Rishi Sunak announced in today's Budget statement that the taxation on petrol and diesel will remain at 57.95p per litre, as it has since March 2011.

He told the Commons: 'I have heard representations that after nine years of being frozen, at a cost of £110 billion to the taxpayer, we can no longer afford to freeze fuel duty,' though conceded that it would remain unchanged because motorists are still heavily reliant on their cars.

The Budget document has also confirmed that the Plug-In Car Grant subsidising the purchase price of a new electric car has been extended to 2022-23.

'I'm certainly mindful of the fiscal cost and the environmental impacts,' he said in his statement.

'But I'm taking considerable steps in this Budget to incentivise cleaner forms of transportation, and many people still rely on their cars.

'So I'm pleased to announce today that for another year fuel duty will remain frozen.

'Compared to 2010 plans, that's a saving of £1,200.'

Fears had grown that Mr Sunak would end the freeze in a bid to convince more drivers to switch to greener electric vehicles.

Environmental groups had heaped pressure on the Chancellor to increase fuel duty to show the Government was serious about tackling climate change.

AA president Edmund King said the motoring group was pleased the Chancellor had listened to his calls to maintain the freeze in fuel duty, as an increase would have had a negative impact on both households and business at a time when 'the economy is fragile given the current circumstances'.

Nicholas Lyes, head of policy at automotive services firm RAC, said the decision was welcomed and will be a 'relief to drivers up and down the country'.

'While the Chancellor might have been tempted to increase duty, the reality is that for millions this would have simply increased their everyday driving costs and done nothing to encourage them to switch to cleaner vehicles,' he added.

'And while many want to seek alternative transport options to using their vehicles for some journeys, in so many parts of the country reasonable public transport provision simply does not exist.'

Steve Gooding, director of motoring research charity RAC Foundation, said: 'The Chancellor clearly recognised that the coronavirus is creating unprecedented health and economic uncertainties, and that because transport is the single biggest area of household expenditure, any move to increase this burden would hit drivers' wallets hard, especially those on lower incomes.'

Howard Cox, who has campaigned for the fuel duty freeze to be retained said the 'rookie Chancellor' had listened to common sense.

The founder of FairFuel UK added: 'This Government must recognise, that drivers do not want to be seen just as environmental pariahs and perennial easy cash cows.

'We must put money back into consumer spending, free up roads congestion and incentivise drivers to move to cleaner fuels and practical solutions to help lower emissions, without the threat of ineffective vehicle bans and regressive pay to pollute taxes.

'Any thought of future tax increases on hard pressed motorists, will result in a Drivers Rebellion. Well done Chancellor, that for the moment is postponed.'

The cost implication to the Treasury of freezing fuel duty could be recovered through the end of a tax relief on red diesel.

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The Chancellor said in two year's time the lower 11p tax on the fuel would be removed for all but the rail, home heating and agricultural sectors.

This would mean an extra £5billion for the Treasury between 2022 and 2025.

The Budget document also revealed there will be a new consultation on plans to change how VED in calculated for drivers, which could see it again more closely linked to CO2 emissions.

Budget confirms £5billion funding for rollout of faster broadband

Fighting fund to reduce rough sleeping

A fighting fund to reduce rough sleeping is expected to be one of Rishi Sunak's main announcements at the Budget.

The Chancellor will unveil a package of investment worth an estimated £643 million.

The cash will be used to help homeless people to get off the streets and to support them to get their lives back on track.

The Tories have been repeatedly hammered by Labour over rising homelessness in recent years and Boris Johnson said in February the current situation was 'totally unacceptable'.

The government has previously announced a £236 million fund to tackle homelessness with rough sleeping in England having more than doubled over the past ten years.

Mr Johnson said last month: 'The number of people sleeping rough in our country is way too high. It is true that they have been coming down in the last year or so, but we want to drive that forward now.

'We want to make a big, big dent in those numbers.'

A £5billion investment to roll out faster broadband across the UK by 2025 was confirmed by the Chancellor in today's Budget.

The Conservatives pledged at the general election to bring full fibre and gigabit-capable broadband to every home and business in Britain within five years.

Rishi Sunak has confirmed the cash injection which he hopes will benefit more than five million homes and businesses.

Gigabit broadband, which is 40 times faster than standard superfast broadband, will be rolled out to the hardest to reach 20 per cent of the country, the Treasury has already announced.

The Chancellor is also expected to announce a £1 billion deal with the mobile phone industry to boost 4G coverage across the country - with the biggest improvements likely to be in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The deal will provide extra coverage to 280,000 premises and 16,000km of roads, the Treasury anticipates.

Mr Sunak said: 'We are committed to levelling up across every region and nation in the UK and that is why we are making the largest ever public investment into broadband.

'This investment delivers on our promises to the British people, boosting growth and prosperity across the country.'

Parents of sick babies will get £160 a week extra so they can focus on crisis

Parents of sick newborn babies will be able to claim a new neonatal pay and leave entitlement under measures set to be announced by the Chancellor at today's Budget.

Rishi Sunak will outline plans to allow new mothers and fathers to claim statutory paid leave for every week their child is in neonatal care, up to a maximum of 12 weeks, when he delivers his first Budget on Wednesday.

Treasury Minister Kemi Badenoch said the cost of the leave - to be paid at a rate of around £160 per week - would almost entirely be incurred by the government, rather than business.

She said: 'This week's Budget is about many things. It will deliver on the promises we made to the British people in last year's election campaign. And it will lay the foundations for the next decade of UK economic growth. What it will also do is deliver support to hard-working families.

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'And for families who are unlucky enough to spend the first period of their child's life in neonatal care it will bring particularly good news. Because the Chancellor will announce that for the first time ever parents in these difficult circumstances will be able to claim a new neonatal pay and leave entitlement.

'We will bring in an historic new entitlement ensuring parents having to take time off work because they have a sick baby will get paid parental leave.'

Cuts to National Insurance could benefit millions of workers

A National Insurance cut was one of the centrepieces of Rishi Sunak's first Budget.

The Conservatives pledged in their 2019 general election manifesto to slash the amount people have to pay.

Mr Sunak has increased the threshold at which payments start from £8,632 to £9,500 with the change coming into effect next month.

Ultimately the Tories want to increase the threshold to £12,500 over the next five years.

Today's move will save workers approximately £100 a year.

The Tory manifesto stated: 'We not only want to freeze taxes, but to cut them too. We will raise the National Insurance threshold to £9,500 next year – representing a tax cut for 31 million workers. Our ultimate ambition is to ensure that the first £12,500 you earn is completely free of tax – which would put almost £500 per year in people's pockets.'

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THE TIMES

news

Government gives pupils sex advice on the roll of a dice

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Schools are being encouraged to teach children as young as 13 about intimate sexual acts using a dice game.

The government has funded a tool kit written by the Proud Trust, an LGBT charity, which includes dice featuring words such as “anus”, “vulva”, “penis” and “hands and fingers”. Children are encouraged to throw the dice twice and talk about the sexual acts that can happen using the two body parts.

The toolkits can be used by schools to help to meet statutory requirements to teach relationships and sex education (RSE) classes as part of reforms introduced for the coming academic year.

As part of the resource, teachers are told to encourage children to talk about lubrication, drawing criticism from parents that it plays down the risks.

The pack tells teachers: “Hold your nerve! Not all combinations will be easy to discuss and some might seem impossible. The aim is to get people talking and to limit assumptions about what kind of sex people have. Every combination is worthy of a conversation!”

In 2017 the Proud Trust was awarded £99,960 for the project, called Sexuality aGender, from the government’s Tampon Tax Fund, which allocates money from VAT receipts on women’s sanitary products to projects that benefit disadvantaged women and girls.

Jackie Doyle-Price, the Tory MP for Thurrock, said: “I fully supported the introduction of RSE into schools as I firmly believed it would be a force for empowering girls to take more control of their bodies and their relationships against a background of increasingly sexualised behaviour in schools and abuse of under-age girls. It is with horror that I see materials being produced which do the exact opposite. Schools should be teaching about mutual respect and consent and safe sex. That such materials have been funded by tampon tax grants is just appalling.”

Tanya Carter, a spokeswoman for Safe Schools Alliance, said: “This ‘resource’ clearly breaches safeguarding. The tampon tax should be used to educate girls on their rights — not prematurely sexualise them.

“When delivering RSE, teachers must be mindful that there will be children in the class who have been or are being sexually abused or exploited and that the lessons will be traumatising for them. It is important that schools widely consult parents and staff to avoid inappropriate materials such as this slipping through the net.”

The toolkits are one of several similar worksheets made by charities for schools that they can use to help to meet their statutory requirements.

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne, a Conservative peer, wrote to Gavin Williamson, the education secretary, protesting at some of the sheets. She wrote: “Unfortunately, while the guidelines are quite good on what they do want, they do not prohibit anything and in consequence seem to be abused.

“Abdicating responsibility to teachers only for them to abdicate it to minority interest lobby groups is surely unsatisfactory, unhealthy and unsafe.

“You acknowledge the correct role of schools in augmenting teaching about relationships and sex, which is, nonetheless, primarily a matter of parental responsibility.

“It is right for the state to ensure that certain bases are covered. Unfortunately, as offered, the guidelines leave the door open for anyone to teach whatever they want at any age they consider appropriate.”

The Proud Trust could not be reached for comment.

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Mail Online

News

Schools are urged to teach children as young as 13 about intimate sexual acts using a dice game sparking fears explicit material is sexualising girls

Sam Baker For Mailonline
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Mail Online
DAMONL
English
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* The Proud Trust's Sexuality aGender v2 toolkit features the explicit dice game

* The sex-ed resource was funded by a £99,960 fund from the Tampon Tax Fund

* There are now fears that the kit could 'prematurely sexualise' school girls

A new government-funded sex-ed toolkit is encouraging schools to get children as young as 13 to discuss explicit sexual acts based on the roll of a dice - but this has led to concerns that girls may be sexualised at a young age.

The resource includes a game where children roll a dice featuring body parts such as 'penis' and 'hand and fingers' twice and are then encouraged to discuss the potential sexual acts carried out between them, The Times reports.

The toolkit, produced by the LGBT+ charity the Proud Trust, itself tells teachers to hold their nerve because some of the combinations 'might seem impossible' for children to talk about.

Tanya Carter, a spokeswoman for Safe Schools Alliance, told The Times: 'This 'resource' clearly breaches safeguarding. The tampon tax should be used to educate girls on their rights — not prematurely sexualise them.'

Who are the Proud Trust?

The Proud Trust describe themselves as a 'life saving and life enhancing organisation that helps LGBT+ young people empower themselves'.

They do this by offering training and resources to educate people about gender, sexuality and LGBT+ issues.

They are based at the LGBT+ Centre for Manchester and help organise national and local youth network groups.

The Trust say their name is intended to reflect their aspiration that every young person can be proud of their identity, without fear or shame.

She said that when teaching relationship and sexual education (RSE), teachers also need to remember that some children will have been victims of sexual abuse and may find the lessons traumatising.

The sex-ed toolkit was launched with funding from the Tampon Tax Fund through the Office for Civil Society.

The Proud Trust was awarded £99,960 in 2017 for their Sexualty aGender project and this latest 'v2' toolkit has been developed using some of these funds.

The MP for Thurrock, Jackie Doyle-Price said that she fully supports the introduction of RSE into schools and 'firmly' believes that it would empower girls to take greater control over their bodies.

However, on the subject of the Proud Trust toolkit she said: 'It is with horror that I see materials being produced which do the exact opposite. Schools should be teaching about mutual respect and consent and safe sex.'

Tory peer Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne has even written to Education Secretary Gavin Williamson about similar courses, saying that it is unsafe to abdicate responsibility for RSE to teachers who then abdicate it to outside groups.

The Proud Trust describe themselves as a 'life saving and life enhancing organisation that helps LGBT+ young people empower themselves'.

On their website, the toolkit is outlined as 'a fun, interactive, engaging and inclusive sexual health toolkit, for use in secondary schools, colleges and other youth settings.'

The trust says that the four-lesson plan inside the kit helps meet statutory requirements to deliver LGBT+ inclusive RSE and that it helps meet the needs of all students.

MailOnline has approached The Proud Trust for comment.

What is the Tampon Tax Fund?

The purpose of the Tampon Tax Fund is to allocate the funds generated from the VAT on sanitary products to front line projects that directly improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls.

The generated funds have been re-distributed by the Government to women's charities since 2015.

The Office for Civil Society, which is part of the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) runs and manages the fund.

However, following from on from Brexit, Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced earlier this year that the Tampon Tax will be abolished by January 2021.

The removal of tax on sanitary products could save women almost £40 each in their lifetime.

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theguardian

Politics
Tampon tax: government axes VAT on sanitary products

Alexandra Topping
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31 December 2020
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Key campaigner Laura Coryton accuses Tory politicians of trying to turn issue into 'pro-Brexit thing'

The tampon tax has been abolished after the government honoured its March commitment to remove VAT on women's sanitary products.

But the campaigner who played a pivotal role in the drive to axe the tax has accused the government of using the issue as a political football, after politicians said it had been scrapped thanks to Brexit. Existing EU law prevented member states from reducing VAT below 5%.

Laura Coryton, who started the Stop Taxing Periods campaign in May 2014 while a student at Goldsmiths, said the Brexit process had made it less likely that the tampon tax would be abolished throughout Europe.

She said: "It is a day for celebration today, but it is just frustrating that the tampon tax is being used as a political football in terms of Brexit."

The chancellor, Rishi Sunak, said he was "proud" the government had delivered on its promise, adding that it was providing free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals.

Speaking at Wednesday's Brexit debate, Sir Bernard Jenkin, the Conservative chairman of the Commons liaison select committee, said: "We will be able to do things like abolish the tampon tax, which so many honourable ladies opposite railed against the government about, only because we're leaving the EU."

Coryton said it was frustrating to hear the scrapping of the tax cited as a victory for Brexit, and hear little mention of the more than 320,000 people who had signed the petition, and campaigning MPs such as Labour's Stella Creasy and the former Labour MP Paula Sherriff.

"It's great that the government is taking it really seriously – if the prime minister can talk about periods, surely anyone can talk about periods," she said. "But it's frustrating … to make this campaign into a pro-Brexit thing, because it doesn't reflect the many different types of people who have been campaigning for it."

Also, it's not true, she said, adding that in 2016 – under pressure from the then prime minister, David Cameron, the European parliament had voted unanimously to start the regulatory process to allow any EU country to abolish any tampon tax.

"That process has since gone cold, because we then left the EU and we were the ones pushing for it," said Coryton. "So if anything, actually, Brexit has made it worse, because if we were to have stayed in the EU, then this piece of legislation would have gone through… then any EU member would be able to axe the tax, not just the UK."

In 2018 the European commission published proposals to change EU VAT rules, which could allow countries to axe the tampon tax in their countries, but it is yet to be agreed on by all member states.

Since 2015 the £15m funds the tampon tax has raised in the UK have been directed to women's refuges and domestic abuse charities. "The tampon tax has long been a symbol of policymaking based around men's needs, so removing VAT is symbolically important,"' said Mary-Ann Stephenson of the Women's Budget Group. "But the tampon tax money has been an important source of funding for the women's sector – the government needs to be clear about what will replace it."

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News
Sunak makes good on his pledge to abolish 'tampon tax'

By Jess Glass
283 words
1 January 2021
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IIND
1ST
14
English
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HEALTH

The "tampon tax" has been abolished in England with VAT on women's sanitary products being slashed to zero from today.

The Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, had committed to ending the widely unpopular tax on tampons and pads in the March Budget. EU law had prevented member states from reducing the rate below 5 per cent, which meant the products were treated as luxury items and not essentials.

But the zero rate VAT on the period products started from today, the first day the laws no longer apply to the UK. Mr Sunak said: "I'm proud that we are today delivering on our promise to scrap the tampon tax. Sanitary products are essential so it's right that we do not charge VAT.

"We have already rolled out free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals and this commitment takes us another step closer to making them available and affordable for all women."

The Treasury previously estimated the move will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Felicia Willow, chief executive of women's rights charity the Fawcett Society, said: "We warmly welcome the scrapping of VAT on all sanitary products and congratulate the Government on taking this positive step.

"It's been a long road to reach this point, but at last the sexist tax that saw sanitary products classed as non-essential, luxury items can be consigned to the history books."

In November, Scotland became the first country in the world to make period products free for all.

Document IIND000020210101eh110002o

News
RISHI AXE FOR TAMPON TAX

KATE FERGUSON
373 words
1 January 2021
The Sun
THESUN
1; National
4
English
© News Group Newspapers 2021

ON THE 1ST DAY OF BREXIT...

EU's 'sexist' levy on women abolished

THE despised tampon tax has been abolished at last cutting the cost of sanitary products for women.

Britain has finally been able to ditch the EU levy as it marks its first day of Brexit freedom.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said he was proud to deliver on what was a pivotal election and Vote Leave pledge.

Felicia Willow, interim CEO of the Fawcett Society, which campaigns on equality, warmly welcomed the move.

She said: "It's been a long road to reach this point but at last the sexist tax that saw sanitary products classed as non-essential, luxury items can be consigned to the history books." The EU forces all member states to impose a minimum five per cent tax on tampons, classing them as luxury items and not essentials.

But critics said it resulted in period poverty, as some women struggled to find the cash to pay for them when it was their time of the month.

The levy became a key issue in the Brexit campaign, with Boris Johnson saying it was yet another reason why the UK should sever ties with Brussels.

Mr Sunak had promised to scrap the tax at the last Budget.

And now Britain has finally left the EU, the tax cut has kicked in today.

The Treasury previously estimated the move would save a woman nearly £40 over her life, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

The Chancellor said: "I'm proud that we are today delivering on our promise to scrap the tampon tax.

"Sanitary products are essential so it's right that we do not charge VAT.

"We have already rolled out free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals and this commitment takes us another step closer to making them available and affordable for all women."

Since 2015, the VAT collected on sanitary products has been ringfenced and donated to women's charities.

And shoppers may not all see a price drop as some supermarkets had committed to absorbing the five per cent tax themselves years ago.

The Sun Says Page 12

Document THESUN0020210101eh1100095

THE TIMES

News
Sunak delivers on vow to scrap 'luxury' tampon tax

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1 January 2021
The Times
T
1; Ireland
13
English
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The tampon tax has been abolished as VAT on women's sanitary products was cut to zero.

Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, had committed to ending the tax on tampons and pads in the March budget.

EU law had prevented member states from reducing the rate below 5 per cent, which meant that period products were treated as luxury items, not essentials.

The zero-rate VAT on period products starts today, the first day the laws no longer apply to the UK.

Mr Sunak said: "I'm proud that we are today delivering on our promise to scrap the tampon tax. Sanitary products are essential so it's right that we do not charge VAT. We have already rolled out free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals and this commitment takes us another step closer to making them available and affordable for all women."

The Treasury estimated the move will save the average woman nearly £40 over her lifetime, with a cut of 7p on a pack of 20 tampons and 5p on 12 pads.

Felicia Willow, chief executive of the Fawcett Society, the women's rights charity, said: "It's been a long road to reach this point but at last the sexist tax that saw sanitary products classed as non-essential, luxury items can be consigned to the history books."

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The Daily Telegraph

News
'Sexist' tampon tax scrapped after break from Brussels

Amy Jones
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1 January 2021
The Daily Telegraph
DT
1; National
8
English
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THE controversial "tampon tax" has been abolished, as Britain breaks free from EU rules. Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor, committed to ending the unpopular levy on tampons and pads in March's Budget and as of today VAT on the products is cut to zero.

Brussels laws prevented the Treasury from reducing the VAT rate on the items below five per cent. Official estimates forecast that scrapping the tax on pads and tampons will save the average woman almost £40 over her lifetime.

The "tampon tax" raised £15million a year for the Treasury, which it donated to women's charities and organisations in recent years. The Tampon Tax Fund was established in 2015 and has allo cated £47million in total.

Mr Sunak said: "I'm proud we are delivering on our promise to scrap the tampon tax. Sanitary products are essential, so it's right we do not charge VAT.

"We have already rolled out free sanitary products in schools, colleges and hospitals and this commitment takes us another step closer to making them available and affordable for all women."

Speaking during Wednesday's Brexit debate, Sir Bernard Jenkin, the Tory chairman of the Commons liaison select committee, raised the issue, saying: "It's worth reminding ourselves that we will be able to do things like abolish the tampon tax - which so many honourable ladies opposite railed against the Government about - only because we're leaving the EU."

The Treasury previously estimated that removing VAT from the products would reduce the price of a pack of 20 tampons by 7p and 12 pads by 5p. Felicia Willow, chief executive of women's rights charity the Fawcett Society, said: "It's been a long road to reach this point, but at last the sexist tax that saw sani tary products classed as non-essential, luxury items can be consigned to the history books."

One study from Plan International found one girl in 10 could not afford sanitary wear in the UK. It also revealed one in seven girls had to borrow from a friend due to financial problems and one in seven had to "improvise". In November, Scotland became the first country to allow free universal access to menstrual products in public facilities.

£15m Sum the Treasury raised through the imposition of the 'tampon tax' - which it then donated to women's charities

Document DT00000020210101eh110002z

News
TAMPON TAX ENDS.PERIOD

Jess Glass
188 words
1 January 2021
Daily Star
DAISTA
1; National
2
English
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THE so-called tampon tax has been abolished as VAT on women's sanitary products was cut to zero.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak committed to ending the tariff in the March Budget last year.

EU law prevents member states from reducing the VAT rate below 5%, which meant the period products were not classed as essential items. But the zero-rate VAT on women's products can start today, as Britain has left the EU.

Mr Sunak said: "I'm proud that we are today delivering on our promise to scrap the tampon tax. Sanitary products are essential, so it's right that we do not charge VAT."

Free sanitary products are now available in primary and secondary schools, colleges and hospitals. The tax cut will save women nearly £40 in a lifetime.

Felicia Willow, head of women's rights charity the Fawcett Society, said: "It's been a long road to reach this point, but at last the sexist tax that saw sanitary products classed as nonessential luxury items can be consigned to the history books."

news@dailystar.co.uk

Document DAISTA0020210101eh110002w

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