

## TODAY'S EDITION

## Further curbs on second homes

Philip Hammond will seek in the budget to cool parts of the housing market as Tory MPs call for more curbs on ownership of second homes and because he wants people to invest in other parts of the economy. **Page 4**

## Womb donation for trans women

The first womb transplant into a transgender woman could happen at any time, Richard Paulson, a senior US fertility scientist, has said. Ethicists warned, however, that the risks of such a procedure would be difficult to justify. **Page 11**

## US warning over nuclear standoff

The US warned Asian allies that time is running out to resolve a nuclear standoff with North Korea, as Donald Trump set off for a regional tour that promised to pose the sternest test so far of his diplomatic skills. **Page 44**

## Apple value nears record \$900bn

Apple was on the brink of becoming America's first \$900 billion company after cheering investors with a bullish sales forecast for the new iPhone X. Its shares briefly hit a record high of \$174.26 yesterday. **Page 51**

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# Brexit minister reported over gift from group that gave £400k to DUP

Oliver Wright Policy Editor

A Brexit minister has been reported to parliament's standards watchdog over a donation he accepted from a mysterious group that helped to bankroll the Brexit referendum campaign.

Steve Baker, a prominent Brexiteer who was promoted by Theresa May after the election to work alongside David Davis, the Brexit secretary, took £6,500 from an organisation called the Constitutional Research Council (CRC).

The same group was behind a donation of £425,622 to the Democratic Unionist Party during the EU referendum campaign. That money was not spent in Northern Ireland but on a national newspaper advertising campaign backing Brexit in England and Scotland.

The CRC has no other record of donations, has no website, no published membership list or any trace of being registered as a company.

Ben Bradshaw, the former Labour culture minister, has written to Kathryn Hudson, the parliamentary commissioner for standards, asking her to investigate the donation.

Under the rules, an MP must satisfy themselves that any donation made to them comes from a "permissible donor".

In his letter, Mr Bradshaw said there was "strong evidence" that the Electoral Commis-

sion had found that the CRC was not a permissible donor but was unable to say so publicly because Northern Irish election law banned the publication of the names of political donors.

This year the commission fined an "entity", believed to be the DUP, £6,000 for failing to comply with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. Neither the DUP nor the CRC were named because of the legal restrictions.

Mr Bradshaw said that he wanted Ms Hudson to establish whether the CRC was a "permissible donor within the framework of the Electoral Commission's guidelines at the time the donation to Mr Baker was made". Mr Baker said he was confident that the donation was registered within the rules. The CRC has claimed that it is registered with the commission.

The CRC and its donation to the DUP has been a source of controversy since it emerged in February. At the time Sir Jeffrey Donaldson, the DUP defence spokesman, said the CRC was "a pro-Union, unionist organisation based in Great Britain". He said it was headed by Richard Cook, a former Scottish Tory candidate and vice chairman of the party, but declined to provide details of other members.

Mr Cook, who formerly worked as national sales manager at Biffa Waste Services, does not

appear to be wealthy enough to be able to afford such a large donation on his own. He and his wife Elaine live in a modest semi-detached house near Glasgow.

Mr Cook has previously declined to name either the CRC members or donors.

Mr Bradshaw has previously raised the issue of the DUP with Andrea Leadsom, leader of the Commons. She said: "I share his concern that we need to make sure that all donations are permissible and legal."

Last night he said: "We know a donation from this organisation to the DUP in the EU Referendum was ruled impermissible by the Electoral Commission and the DUP were fined."

"So, it is important the parliamentary standards commissioner can satisfy herself that a similar breach has not occurred here."

A spokesman for Mr Baker said: "All the steps have been taken to ensure donations are registered and accepted in accordance with the rules, and we are confident that they do so."

Mr Cook has previously told the *Sunday Herald*: "The CRC is regulated by the Electoral Commission. We operate solely in the UK. We accept donations only from eligible UK donors. We donate solely to permissible UK entities. Any suggestion that we have done anything else is basically defamatory."

# Barristers throw out plan to let politicians help choose judges

Frances Gibb Legal Editor

Britain's most senior judge has met with overwhelming opposition from barristers over her idea to involve politicians in appointing senior judiciary.

An poll of nearly 400 barristers conducted for *The Times* has found 87 per cent against the idea put forward by Baroness Hale of Richmond, new president of the Supreme Court. She made the "humble suggestion" as a way of meeting criticisms that the public should have more say in selecting judges because they make decisions with political consequences.

The idea was that for the most senior posts, a senior politician from the government and from the opposition would join the appointments panel. However, the poll, which coincides with the Bar annual conference in London today, shows overwhelmingly opposition to the idea.

Andrew Langdon, QC, chairman of the Bar, said: "The independence of the judiciary will always be guarded fiercely by the Bar. The renowned impartiality of our judiciary sets us apart from others and it is in no one's interests for that reputation to be put at risk. It is difficult to overstate the importance of our being able to continue to point to the entire absence of political interference in judicial appointments."

At a recent press conference, Lady Hale

appeared to acknowledge that the idea had not been well received, insisting that it was "just a suggestion that I floated for discussion".

The survey also found overwhelming opposition — nearly 89 per cent — to the government's plans to proceed with a pilot scheme on "flexible" court hours that would lead to night and early morning sittings. The pilot is due to start in February.

Barristers and solicitors have expressed concern that the move would discriminate against working mothers in particular, who have to juggle child care arrangements with court work, and undermine moves to improve diversity at the Bar.

Mr Langdon said: "The profession is overwhelmingly against the idea of flexible operating hours, which is in effect a scheme whereby courts will sit in early and late shifts. Many barristers, particularly those with caring responsibilities, worry that they will find it difficult or impossible to carry on working given the resulting unpredictability of their commitments, and that will hit women the hardest."

It will also disproportionately affect those who are less able to afford more expensive care assistance. This could wind back the clock on equality and undermine years of hard work the profession has undertaken to promote a better gender balance and social mobility."

# Data protection bill 'threatens press freedom'

Matthew Moore Media Correspondent

An attempt to narrow the journalistic exemptions to tough new data protection laws has been criticised as an "acute threat to freedom of expression" by the newspaper industry.

Amendments tabled to the Data Protection Bill, which is in the Lords, will make it more difficult for reporters to pursue investigative journalism, it is claimed.

On Thursday peers proposed amendments that would have obliged print journalists to follow the standards code endorsed by Impress, the state-approved press regulator, in order to claim a public interest defence when accessing personal data to expose wrongdoing. The original bill stipulated that journalists should follow the Editors' Code of Practice overseen by Ipso, the regulator that counts most national, regional and local newspapers as members.

The newspaper industry accused the peers of trying to hijack the bill to push publishers to join Impress. Those amendments have now been replaced by amendments that the industry claims will create a presumption of privacy.

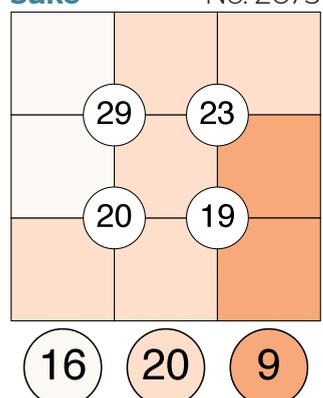
The News Media Association said that the amendments would "create an acute threat to press freedom and freedom of expression".

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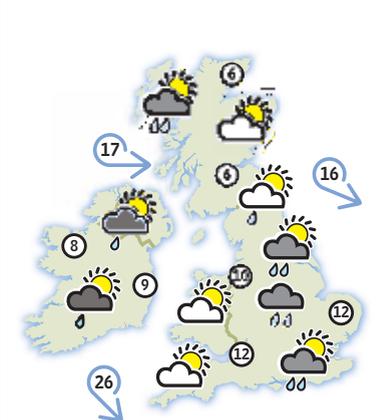
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THE WEATHER



Heavy rain in the southeast; showers and sunny spells over northwestern areas. Full forecast, page 81