

A Minister in office is not always in power

The events of recent weeks have shown that it is possible to be a Minister in office unable to see through changes of policy or enforcement of laws in ways the public and Ministers wish.

At the Home Office successive Ministers have made clear their wish to end people trafficking across the Channel. There has been a change of the law, yet still lawyers and legal processes conspire to delay final decisions on cases. People can claim to have been trafficked yet we do not seem able to return to their home from whence they were trafficked. People claim they are asylum seekers yet they have come immediately from the safe country of France, and often came from another safe country before France. Two Home Secretaries have now been briefed against and complained about by civil servants. The Ministers have doubtless become frustrated at the lack of help to design a law which works or to enforce a law which was said to work. The idea is meant to be Ministers set out the aims of policy and provide the resources, whilst officials get on with implementing it in the best way.

At the Treasury Ministers are told they need to follow Bank and OBR orthodoxy. There has been a notable lack of self criticism or curiosity as to how the UK has an 11% inflation rate when Ministers have endorsed a constant target of 2% inflation and left the Bank free to set interest rates, interfere in bond markets and oversee the overall banking system to bring this about. Nor has there been much public exploration of why successive OBR forecasts have been tens of billions out in recent years, and how this can lead Ministers to accept wrong judgements based on bad data. Treasury Ministers need to be more sceptical of the advice they are getting as so far it has landed us with an unwelcome inflation and may soon land us in an unwanted recession.