

Brexit wins

As we now have a new Minister charged with the task of securing some of the many wins the UK can enjoy from its freedoms out of the EU I will be writing a few pieces setting out some of those opportunities again to assist the government's task.

Today I wish to look at a few of the particular laws and ECJ decisions of the EEC/EU which were opposed by the UK at the time and were damaging to UK interests.

There was the Factortame case, the first one where an Act of Parliament was struck down by the ECJ. The ECJ prevailed and prevented the UK's Merchant Shipping Act from boosting the UK fleet. We should reinstate measures to expand our merchant marine and fishing fleets as other independent countries do.

There was the EU legislation to damage the competitive position of the UK auction houses and to impose the droit de suite payments, helping US rivals. This could be amended.

There was the EU railway legislation requiring the separation of track and trains, which needs changing to allow a reconfigured railway with single accountability for track and train where appropriate.

As we were leaving the EU imposed a Ports Directive which the UK government and the industry disagreed with. It should be repealed.

The current "transition" for our fishery still leaves too much of the catch for EU boats at the expense of our own industry. EU policy led to a big loss of UK based fishing activity, and a move of the UK from being a net exporter to being a net importer of fish.

There was the set of decisions of the ECJ that reduced the UK tax take from Corporation tax, as with the case that decided continental losses could be offset against UK profits which the Treasury had contested. The Treasury should review the cases and legislate where it wishes to impose the original intention.

Security Certificate

I told the web service provider about the Security Certificate notice which also blocked me. It seems to have been sorted out.

Resolving the Northern Ireland trade issues

Next week the EU is likely once again to try to force its wrong interpretation of the NI Protocol onto the U.K. negotiating team. Once more the EU will wish to ignore the mutual enforcement proposal from the U.K. which could free GB/ NI trade from EU restrictions whilst offering U.K. enforcement to prevent the on sale and delivery of goods into the EU from NI that are not compliant with EU rules.

The EU has violated the Protocol in three main ways. It has used it to divert trade from GB/NI to NI/EU. It has damaged the Good Friday Agreement with the First Minister vacating his office over the EU attitude to the Protocol. It has failed to maintain the support of the Unionist community for the EU approach because the EU does not respect NI's place in the U.K.

The U.K. government should move now to offer NI some of the Brexit benefits. NI should be offered a large Freeport to promote investment and trade with a range of tax concessions and facilitation for growing businesses. Why not offer to match the Republic of Ireland's low Corporation tax rate? The government should remove VAT from all green products and from domestic fuel, and legislate for this to apply in NI as well as the rest of the U.K.

New Covid Vaccination Centre To Open This Weekend at the Wokingham Library

Wokingham Borough Council have informed me of the opening of a new walk-in Covid-19 vaccination centre at the Wokingham Library. Please see their announcement below:

NEW COVID-19 VACCINATION CENTRE TO OPEN IN WOKINGHAM THIS WEEKEND

A new walk-in Covid-19 vaccination centre will open at the Wokingham Library this Friday (18 February), to help make access to the vaccine easier for residents.

The site will open from 2pm to 7pm on Fridays and 11am to 4.45pm on Saturdays and Sundays, with no appointment necessary. A review of the site will take place after six weeks, so the council is encouraging residents to make good use of the facility.

First, second, and booster doses of the Pfizer vaccine are available to **all** eligible people, including:

- Pregnant women
- 12–15-year-olds
- People not registered with a GP or those without an NHS number
- People with no indefinite leave to remain status

Visitors travelling by car can park at Denmark Street Car Park, and more parking options are available across the town.

Cllr Charles Margetts, executive member for health, wellbeing and adult services, said: “One of the cornerstones of moving forward and living with endemic Covid is vaccination. While the uptake rate is good in the borough, there are still many people who are yet to take up the offer, and we have often felt it would be significantly improved by the provision of more local vaccination centres.

“We have campaigned for months for a standalone vaccination centre in the borough and are pleased that the CCG has agreed to our request. We would encourage all residents to take advantage of this local facility and get vaccinated, and we look forward to welcoming residents in for their jabs.”

Nobody going for their first, second or booster jab will be questioned about why they haven’t had it yet. The onsite staff will be happy to welcome residents. Anyone who has questions about the Covid-19 vaccine can come and chat to the health professionals working at the site or email the council’s vaccine support team on covid.info@wokingham.gov.uk.

“Everyone would like to see the back of the pandemic, but it is important that we don’t lose sight of what protects us from the virus”, said Cllr Margetts. “While Omicron is milder in the sense that it has so far resulted in a lower hospitalisation and death rate than prior variants, it can still make you very sick and it is highly transmissible. The vaccine is what helps make this sickness less serious, reduce transmission and it is still strongly recommended.”

If you tested positive in December and were unable to get your booster, it’s now time to come forward for it (28 days/4 weeks from when you tested positive). Parents, carers and guardians are also encouraged to bring children and young people over the age of 12 to this new site over half term (for 12–15-year-olds this must be 12 weeks from the date of their positive PCR test if they were recently infected).

For Covid-19 vaccine updates in the borough, please keep an eye on the Wokingham Borough Council website:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/covid-19/testing-and-vaccinations/covid-19-vaccinations/>

How will the extra money for the NHS be spent?

The government has embarked on administrative reform again for the NHS. This time it stems from the senior management of the NHS rather than from any political agenda. As the new budgets transfer and shake down it is time for Ministers to engage more fully with NHS management over how the extra cash is going to be spent. They need also to chase up how the special budgets of the covid period will be closed down as we move on from needing huge sums to be spent on vaccine development and roll out, on test and trace, and on supplementing NHS capacity with rights to use much of the capacity of the private sector or with the construction of new temporary facilities.

It seems that Ministers find it difficult to get all the information and reassurance they need from senior management of NHS England. The structure is said to be devolved, with considerable independence granted to the senior management. That is all very well but Ministers are thought to be responsible and have to answer for the service in the Commons and to the public and media. There is rarely any sign of senior management taking public responsibility for mistakes and removing senior managers that have failed, so Ministers do need to insist on seeing, influencing and signing off the main plans and headings of spending. Ministers after all have to make the overall judgement about how much money the NHS needs to perform its tasks, and to weigh priorities where choices have to be made.

The Secretary of State needs to press the management to come up with a proper staffing plan. More medically trained people are needed to perform procedures, to diagnose problems and supervise treatments. The UK needs to train more of our own people to provide the numbers we need. The NHS could look into what is relevant and necessary training for each of the medical tasks that need to be performed. As we saw with vaccine roll out the registered doctors and nurses could be supplemented by others to get the job done.

The government needs to decide how much use it wishes to make of the private hospitals and clinics to provide additional care free to NHS patients . During the early days of the pandemic it was paying for a lot of private capacity it was not fully using. Speciality centres that are good at cataracts or hip replacements or knee surgery could offer high quality treatments at fair prices for the NHS to take some of the burden off the District General hospitals.

The government and NHS need to decide how far the digital revolution in health care should go. Many people may well be happy to see their GP via a video link as it avoids the travel and delay for a visit. Others who wish to see them in person should have that option unless there is a good reason not to. Hospital records, vaccination records and drug treatment patterns in hospital or at home could all benefit from digital recording with easy access for patient and medics alike.