

Dame Lucy sees the need to help

I was thinking it has been a poor time for leaks, when to my surprise the following intercepted memo appeared anonymously in my inbox. It appears by keeping a low profile during turbulent Brexit times Dame Lucy has survived in the Cabinet Office.

From Head of Cabinet Office Post Brexit renewal unit

To Professor Redmayne, Professor of European inequalities

Dear Karl

I need your advice to assist me in presenting to Ministers on how to tackle various supply chain and labour market issues which you will have seen in the media. As you will appreciate I worked very closely with the previous government to try to secure an Agreement with the EU that captured and retained all EU law and our single market obligations. This was in accordance with the then Prime Minister's wishes to replicate many of the features of our membership to avoid changes and shocks. This work was altered by the change of Prime Minister in 2019 and by Parliament's unwillingness to vote for the comprehensive partnership we had secured.

As the head of the new Post Brexit Renewal unit I need to give advice on how the government should behave towards the full body of EU law that is now on our Statute books, and how we should negotiate if at all on the Northern Ireland Protocol and the transition over fishing. Looking at the situation it seems to me I need to point out that the UK does now rely on imports for some of its electricity and fuel, that it needs to respect EU law under the NI Protocol and should not be dogmatic about fish given the passionate concerns the French have about this minor industry. The government needs to understand the power of the EU and the legal realities of the position they find themselves in.

It would be most helpful if as an external independent expert you could let me have background on the extent that the UK will need imported food and fuel over the next few years. A study of relative regional imbalances in EU countries and the UK would be topical given the debate here about levelling up. If it is your continued view that freedom of movement of workers and adherence to the common fishing, energy and farming policies and standards is best for the UK it would be good to have the case set out. I would expect you to have the contacts in and references from larger European companies who would take this sensible view.

There is a strand of Brexit commentary taking hold that thinks paying people at home more to take jobs that would otherwise go to continentals coming here under freedom of movement would be a good idea. They are also keen to rebuild domestic capacity in everything from food to fish and from energy to technology. Your help in explaining the difficulties and theoretical problems with this approach would also be a useful balance to the debate.

Some Ministers think there are easy Brexit wins from changing laws and cutting taxes like VAT on various products. We need to present the case against a race to the bottom and set out the balance set by the growing body of EU law designed to protect the single market and European values. They do not seem to understand that it makes sense to import more food, cars, energy and other items in a spirit of European solidarity, and to welcome EU workers here.

Given the prestige of your department and the important work it does I am sure we can come to some agreement on the scope and reward for this study that a Minister will approve. I will draft it around the twin themes of levelling up and post Brexit policy. I note that the Health department has recently agreed a study mainly of health inequalities when the Treasury wanted a simple attack on waste in the NHS.

Yours

Dame Lucy Dolittle