

What should Esther McVey do?

Esther McVey is taking up a new post in the Cabinet Office as Minister without portfolio. The press say she is the “Commonsense Czar”, the wokefinder general, the slayer of wrong headed wokery.

So where should she begin?

The kind of commonsense I would like from government includes putting the public first when designing public services. Car parks that are friendly where it is easy to use the machines, rather than tax and fine traps with complex rules and limited ways to pay. Roads designed and looked after with drivers in mind, rather than obstacle traps getting in the way of getting around. Council websites that are easy to access and allow you to see what service is on offer, find out things about your local area, and see an honest account of where all the tax money is going to. Appointments that can easily be arranged to access a public service and mean the times on the agreement. Trains that run on time and are not cancelled. More commonsense on net zero, better value for money from many public services, less intrusion into our lives by government. Fewer forms and compliance with ever more rules.

The government may have in mind altering views on cultural matters.

What would you want her to take up and achieve?

Votes on the Israel/Hamas war

I voted in accordance with the Conservative Party whip. I support the government as it urges all involved to avoid civilian casualties, to obey the laws of war, to provide humanitarian pauses and facilitate humanitarian aid. I support its diplomatic work to press the humanitarian case and to seek to get UK citizens out safely.

Like those who send emails about loss of life in Gaza I want to see an end to the deaths of civilians in Gaza. Like those who send me emails about the attacks on Israeli civilians and about the hostages I wish to see an end to those attacks and a release of the hostages.

Of course I would like a ceasefire to end the violence. This can only come when the two sides can agree one. It cannot be imposed from the UK.

The letter and the Court

Suella Braverman has made clear that she thought she had the agreement of the Prime Minister to legislate over small boats in such a way that the UK Courts would have to follow the wishes of Parliament rather than applying overseas rules and laws. She also claims his agreement to legislating to change the Northern Ireland Protocol and to remove unwanted EU inherited laws. She resigned because these promises were not kept. Downing Street has not contradicted these statements.

The government lost in court yesterday. They had refused to include the notwithstanding amendment some of us proposed and the outgoing Home Secretary says she wanted which we think would have offered better protection for the small boats policy.

The Prime Minister promised legislation to deal with the Supreme Court issues over Rwanda . This legislation needs improving and widening if it is to work. He must clarify Parliament's aim to stop the small boats and to send illegal migrants elsewhere in a law which overrides any international agreement which could act as the people traffickers friend. Simply embedding a new Rwanda Treaty in law leaves the government policy subject to further legal upsets based on international treaties, the ECHR and principles.

The PM must continue his reform of net zero policies

My latest Conservative Home article

The Prime Minister made a little headway with Conservative opinion when he announced a new realism concerning the road to net zero. Former Conservative voters who are telling pollsters they will abstain or vote Reform took some interest in what he had to say. They agreed that it makes sense to get our own oil and gas out of the North Sea instead of importing more. It brings us better paid jobs, lots of tax revenue and lowers world CO₂ output. They agreed we should not ban new diesel and petrol cars in 2030. They are expecting more in this same sensible vein and are impatient for future developments.

The world background is so different from the world implied by UK policy. Most forecasts expect oil and gas output and use to continue to increase this decade. Most anticipate further large increases in CO₂ output this decade from China and for many years from India. As a result we are still some way off peak CO₂ output for the world. Many UK people who buy into the idea of curbing world carbon output do not see the point in the UK cutting back further on its own high energy using activities if we simply import what is needed from countries like China. They carry on burning coal

oil and gas to make the things for us. If the UK did more for itself the amount of world carbon dioxide output would fall a little as we would save all the transport CO₂ to bring in the goods from abroad, and would often have more fuel efficient processes than the leading exporters. It would also help if we grew more of our own food instead of using subsidies to stop home production.

The UK has allowed itself to get hung up on wonky carbon accounting. If we import all the wood we need to burn in the Drax power station apparently that is green, but if we started producing our own sustainable timber to burn there would be a CO₂ attribution. What about all the extra CO₂ bringing the wood all the way across the Atlantic causes? Shouldn't we account for that? If we close down our coal burning blast furnaces and import our steel we have cut our CO₂ but world CO₂ will go up. In the meantime we have lost the jobs and the tax revenues making our own steel brings, and have weakened our ability to make things from steel including vital defence items. The Prime Minister is good at detail so he needs to challenge these absurdities in official policy formation.

There needs to be a big rethink on the idea that we can get everyone to net zero by regulating, lecturing and fining companies. It's a crazy world where our energy companies are fined because not enough people are prepared to have a "free" smart meter in their homes. The government needs to ask why people do not want them and trust them instead of wasting so much tax money on trying to get them adopted. It is bizarre that car companies making and selling vehicles here will be fined if they sell too many diesel and petrol cars at a time when electric cars are unpopular with the general public. Again the issue is ,how can electric cars be made affordable and attractive to customers? The government keeps on recommending heat pumps to be faced with tiny demand compared to the popular gas boilers. They need to work on their affordability, their practicality and their running costs. They also need to let the industry catch up. I would like a good one for my flat but there is nothing on offer that could be installed in my block. It is strange that there are windfall taxes on those who dare to meet our demand for oil and gas, and now there are also windfall taxes on renewables if they are too profitable. The aim is always to end up with ever dearer and less competitive energy

The government also needs to lead thinking on the pace of change and the order of putting in the investments it does help pay for or regulates. If someone goes out and buys an electric vehicle today when they plug it in to recharge the electricity companies will doubtless have to burn some more gas to supply the power as they normally use all the available renewables for existing demand. How does that help us on the road to net zero.? If too many people got an electric car or heat pump there will not be enough grid and street cable capacity to supply their needs. When will the grid catch up? When will more investors be able to connect new wind or solar farms to the grid, where there is a long queue? Shouldn't we put in the infrastructure first?

If someone scraps an older petrol car and buys a new electric vehicle how long does it take to offset all the extra CO₂ generated by making the one and scrapping the other? If the driver does a normal mileage many years pass where the impact is more CO₂ from the change, not less. This is aggravated all the time the recharging electricity may have to come from

fossil fuels.

Taxing carbon is said to be the market based solution to these dilemmas. What our regime does is hasten the end of high energy using industries in the UK, speeding more imports and thus boosting not reducing world CO₂ output. The UK has especially high energy prices given the taxes and market regulation, which is wonderful news for our competitors who take a more pragmatic approach to energy pricing. The UK has lost a lot of capacity in aluminium, glass, petrochemicals, fertilisers, steel, ceramics and other similar industries as a result of our lop sided approach to making and using these products. We consume them avidly but moralise about how we must not make them here. Last week saw the sad news that our remaining blast furnaces are under threat of closure. The Opposition scarecely stirred over it. Surely this matters? We used to battle long and hard to invest in and keep a variety of large domestic steel plants as a crucial part of our industrial base.

Meanwhile the government allows very large number of migrants in to undertake mainly low paid work. Given the importance of national CO₂ accounting to the system why do we not reduce this? Every new person coming in creates extra demand for CO₂ for all the homes, products and jobs they need. Following a low wage model is bad for many reasons as well as the environmental impact. We should aim for a higher real wage higher productivity economy. Better energy efficiency should be part of the greater emphasis on investment in good machine and computing power to do more of the tasks. If we invite in an additional 600,000 workers every year as we did last year that requires huge outpourings of CO₂ to build the homes, hospitals, roads, sewage works, power stations, schools and the rest they will need, and to run them. We then need bigger cuts in CO₂ elsewhere in energy using activities to hit targets.

The official government uses the policy wish to get to net zero to override common sense in its advice to Ministers and in the decisions of quangos. This come to suppress other important policy aims like increasing real wages, cutting poverty and promoting prosperity. It is time for a further re think, starting by getting rid of some of those so called net zero policies which mean more world CO₂ and fewer UK jobs.

[The Home Secretary](#)

It would have been better if the Home Secretary and Prime Minister had agreed both the policy and the way to explain it. As I understand it the policy was heavily influenced by Downing Street who ruled out the amendment many of us wanted to the Immigration Act to ensure the small boats can be stopped without ECHR override. The Home Secretary was more sympathetic, understanding the need to be sure she could deliver what is after all the Prime Minister's promise, to stop the small boats.

The Prime Minister now needs to hope the courts are kind to him this week when we hear the result of the further UK appeal against his policy. There

still remains open the possibility of someone trying to use the European Court of Human Rights as well, which is why it would have been better to have made the legislation ECHR court proof. If the purpose of the law is not clearly enough set out for the Supreme Court in the UK then obviously amended law should be able to fix that. They should put through a simple amendment as quickly as possible.

Let us hope a Cabinet of people the PM feels happy with can deliver the five pledges the Prime Minister has made. He also needs to make sure the Cabinet has a wide enough range of views so the debate is worth having and the conclusions more to the liking of the audience outside.

I think it wrong to appoint David Cameron to the Lords and Cabinet. We need a Foreign Secretary in the Commons and one who is a strong believer in Brexit UK developing her role in the world, taking advantage of our new Brexit freedoms.