

## [My Question to the Home Secretary during the Urgent Question on Channel crossings in small boats](#)

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## [Visit to the Holt School](#)

On Friday 19th November I visited the Holt School and heard a series of presentations about how to improve the environment. The students presented some good ideas to tackle litter, to plant more trees, to collect more rainwater, to grow more food locally, to reuse and recycle more and to offer more vegetarian options for school meals.

In the conversation with three of the students leading the initiative we ranged widely over environmental issues, with particular attention to energy. I set out some of the background for them on current energy policy and how the UK generates its electricity before we went on to explore issues about combining interruptible renewables with other forms of power to keep the lights on.

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## [Free ports need to be freed to succeed](#)

As one who wanted Freeports I am deeply disappointed that they were not set up and open for business on 2nd January. I am fed up with the delays and with the lack of incentives to make them fly.

I read that the Treasury first delayed them, then watered them down. Apparently officials ignored the enthusiasm of the PM and the one time enthusiasm of the Chancellor. They limited any tax relief on the grounds that it might just redirect business from another part of the U.K. to a free port, cutting tax revenues. No thoughts then of growing a bigger economy by offering some tax cuts so you collect more revenue. It's a pity the Chancellor did not stand up to this unhelpful redrafting.

There is a strong case for more generous tax cuts and incentives to attract new investment that would not otherwise happen. The Freeports could also have

simplified planning requirements and assistance with land assembly.

Even better would be to extend the tax cuts to the whole country. Set a Corporation tax rate of 15%, the same as the new rate for Ireland, and watch the business pour in. Where is the imagination and enterprise vision? Why does the Chancellor go along with dismal Treasury views that will slow our recovery and keep the deficit high?

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## Who is in charge?

The Health Secretary struggles to tell us how many CEOs there are in NHS England and seeks more money to get the waiting lists down without saying how the money will be spent or by how much waiting lists will fall.

The Transport Secretary presides over a railway sending largely empty trains around the country making huge losses, told by the railway management they need to carry on with the same timetables and same cost base as pre pandemic.

The Home Secretary tells the Home Office to stop the people smuggling and trafficking, approves more resources and a new Channel Command, but the numbers keep coming.

Government has been made much less responsive by the theory of independent bodies run by civil servants or CEOs who seek to keep Ministers at arms length. NHS England, Network Rail and Border Force have their own powers and independence when it suits. When something goes wrong they expect Ministers to vote more money and take the blame.

Given the growing gap between what the public wants and what some of these independent bodies deliver, Ministers need to take more control. Change, better service and more value for money is needed. The NHS needs to get the waiting lists down, the railways need to tailor services to changed demand and border force needs to stop the illegals.

I will be writing several blogs about the productivity problem in the public sector, the myth of independent bodies and the need to reset management and aims of important services.

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## GPs and NHS management

Yesterday I discussed the state of the GP service with some local doctors. They told me they are seeing substantially more patients now than just before

the pandemic struck, as there has been a surge in demand. They see the majority of patients face to face. Some patients agree a remote consultation makes sense and may be more convenient for them. I have not been receiving complaints about this surgery and am grateful to them for the work they are doing.

They also drew my attention to the need to receive prompt confirmation of sufficient budgets for their patient list size and workload. There is a danger the new commissioners, the Integrated Care Board, will delay or misjudge the competing claims of GPs and hospitals. There is also a need for NHS England to limit the number of additional demands or changed commands they issue in year. There needs to be a clear understanding of the split of the workloads between hospitals and GPs where primary care effectively undertakes some of the work for the Hospital Consultant.

Good GPs are concerned about some of the commentary suggesting surgeries are not doing enough or are refusing to arrange easy face to face appointments. Those who allege this or circulate rumours need to be more precise over who they are criticising and what the evidence is. All GPs under contract to the NHS do have to run proper complaints procedures so people with a concern should use these.

It is important that the large sums approved for health in the last two years are directed to those in primary care and hospitals who can do most to provide great care and help clear the backlog.