

Which inherited EU laws should be improved or removed?

This is a live topic again in Whitehall as many departments make heavy weather of sorting out the huge mass of EU laws.

I would start with the complex Emissions Trading scheme. Let's suspend it as energy prices are so high. The UK version produces the highest carbon taxes making UK industry less competitive. Far from cutting CO₂ the scheme drives the closure of UK business and makes us dependent on more imports. That adds transport CO₂ to fossil fuel intensive output from the exporting country.

Move on to taking VAT off domestic energy and make its removal from green products permanent. Put up the VAT threshold to £250,000 from the EU £85,000 ceiling to allow more small businesses to expand. Amend the fishing regulations to boost the domestic industry and expand the home fleet.

Change the myriad product specification rules. Keep a strong safety requirement but remove the detail about how you can and cannot make individual items. The ban on various hoovers showed this regulation up as unhelpful to UK business.

I have many more proposals but would be interested to hear yours.

Meeting with Minister on new SEND schools

I met with the Minister to welcome the decision to go ahead with two new SEND schools in Wokingham Borough including one in my constituency. Extra provision is needed to give parents and pupils choice where they need special support in education.

I also explained to the Minister that there is a disagreement locally about the site for one of the schools. Rook's Nest is an important green gap between settlements. The site of the old Farley Primary School is a site that has been developed before. Building at Farley would be less contentious, could draw on developer money and could be expedited. The Minister said Wokingham Council seemed to favour Rook's Nest and they would have big role in determining the detail of the project. The government would be happy with a suitable project at the Farley site.

Over to the Council.

Exercising Brexit freedoms?

Successive Prime Ministers have not used a lot of Brexit talent on the backbenches.

I raise this now because the current administration is becoming more Remain establishment with each reshuffle. The new Justice Secretary and new Deputy PM are both from the Remain stable. The Attorney General and the Chancellor of the Exchequer are also.

Today the test of Brexit resolve surrounds the EU Retained law Bill. The Prime Minister has always shown good support for this measure. It passed the Commons easily with a majority of 71. It is now stuck in the Lords where there are said to be many critics. If that is so they should be asked to complete their consideration and amendment of the Bill so the Commons can reaffirm its support and get it through, with or without use of the Parliament Act.

The Bill proposes keeping all those EU laws which are valued, where Ministers should bring forward confirmatory Parliamentary action to cement their passage into direct UK law. It allows the EU laws to cease to have effect where they are not wanted. Some say this is too big a job for the civil service. I say they know these laws as they were usually very keen to get them adopted,. Department by Department they can help Ministers winnow out those laws that UK Ministers opposed at the time of their introduction or thought were unhelpful, and those laws which have been found to be unhelpful since.

Continued support for non-domestic energy customers

I have received the letter below from the Government regarding continued support for non-domestic energy customers.

The Energy Bills Discount Scheme provides a continuation of support to nondomestic customers, with support backdated to the start of April. It will provide all eligible businesses and other nondomestic energy customers with a discount on high gas and electricity bills until 31 March 2024. It will also provide businesses in energy and trade intensive industry sectors with a higher level of support as they are less able to pass these higher costs on to customers due to international competition.

Dear Colleagues,

RE: Continued Support for Non-domestic Energy Customers

I am writing to you about the Regulations that deliver the Energy Bills Discount Scheme. The Regulations were laid in Parliament on 25 April 2023 and come into force on 26 April.

I am delighted to announce that, following the Energy Bill Relief Scheme ending on 31 March, the Energy Bills Discount Scheme provides a continuation of support to non-domestic customers, with support backdated to the start of April. The Government provided an unprecedented package of support for non-domestic customers through the winter in the shape of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme, with total support of £7.3bn expected to be provided under this scheme, shielding businesses and saving some around half of their wholesale energy cost. The Government has taken difficult but right and considered decisions when necessary, following an unprecedented rise in energy prices, to support our essential UK businesses and public sector services.

Wholesale energy prices have fallen significantly since the introduction of the Energy Bill Relief Scheme. The Energy Bills Discount Scheme reflects this change and makes adjustments to the support provided under the Energy Bill Relief Scheme. The Energy Bills Discount Scheme strikes a balance between supporting businesses between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and limiting taxpayers' exposure to volatile energy markets.

The scheme provides long term certainty for businesses and reflects how the scale of the challenge has changed since September last year. This will help businesses locked into contracts signed before recent substantial falls in the wholesale price of energy manage their costs and provide others with reassurance against the risk of prices rising again. This is a serious intervention in order to protect the public and the economy from significant increases in energy bills.

The Energy Bills Discount Scheme will provide all eligible businesses and other non-domestic energy customers with a discount on high gas and electricity bills until 31 March 2024. It will also provide businesses in energy and trade intensive industry sectors with a higher level of support as they are less able to pass these higher costs on to customers due to international competition. The Energy Bills Discount Scheme price reduction will be linked to the wholesale element of a non-domestic customer's gas and electricity bill and Government will reimburse suppliers in accordance with the scheme.

Further support will be available to domestic end users on heat networks, who fall under the Energy Bills Discount Scheme due to heat network operators having commercial energy contracts, to ensure they do not face disproportionately higher energy bills than consumers in equivalent households who benefit from the Energy Price Guarantee. Heat suppliers will be required to apply for this support and then pass on any discounts to their customers in a 'just and reasonable' way.

Eligibility for support under the Energy Bill Relief Scheme and the Energy Bills Discount Scheme will also be extended to additional non-standard cases not previously eligible. This includes where: non-domestic customers have received gas or electricity from license-exempt suppliers via private wire (localised electricity grids connected to local distribution networks but linked to a privately-owned central plant which produces electricity) or pipe (where gas is conveyed to the customer's premises by pipe) and where prices paid are pegged to wholesale energy prices.

The Energy Bills Discount Scheme Regulations will ensure that essential energy bill support is provided to businesses in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, that are supplied both by licensed gas and electricity suppliers and license-exempt suppliers. They will also ensure that any non-domestic business or individual that receives energy through an intermediary will also benefit from the Energy Bills Discount Scheme in a 'just and reasonable' way.

Further information on the Energy Bills Discount Scheme including legislation, rules and guidance can be found on our Energy Bills Discount Scheme page.

Amanda Solloway MP
Minister for Energy Consumers & Affordability

My Intervention on the Sudan **Ministerial Statement**

I was one of the MPs who pressed Ministers to take more urgent action to get UK nationals out of Sudan where they wished to leave. I am glad they are now running some flights. The FCO needs to do all it can to contact and support UK people who are in Sudan against their wishes. They deserve our full attention and help.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

The Government advise nationals in difficulties to stay indoors, but what if they run out of food, what if there is no power, water or other utilities, or what if there is fire in the local area? What is the advice and message of hope for them then?

Mr Andrew Mitchell, Minister of State for Development and Africa:

My right hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. The only advice that we can give through the Foreign Office—the only advice—is to stay indoors, because of all the reasons that I have given during the statement about the jeopardy on the streets outside. We have changed the advice today to say that although we think that people should undoubtedly remain indoors if they can, if they do not, it is at their own risk. But they must make their decisions on the ground. Of course, there are those who know the situation around where

they live extremely well and may well be able to exercise their judgment, but they do so at their own risk.