

Who will control these dangerous independent bodies?

I regularly advised senior Ministers to institute proper reporting and accountability for the host of so called independent bodies that rule us. They usually agreed, yet they seem to struggle to impose the discipline or to find the time to do it.

As a result we have The Environment Agency and Ofwat responsible for water often unable to stop floods and granting permissions for sewage discharges to rivers owing to a long term lack of investment in sufficient pipe capacity. The Environment Agency wanted wilding instead of food growing and profitable forestry. The Bank of England charged with keeping inflation down gave us a peak inflation five and a half times target. The NHS England Board insulated the NHS from much ministerial involvement, then denied any responsibility for falling out with the staff or for the build up of waiting lists and the drop in productivity. Border force was unable to propose and implement a policy to carry through Ministerial wishes to end the small boats business across the Channel.

The role of the Minister should encompass an annual budget meeting to review finance and use of resources, agree fee and charge levels and any Treasury payment to the body. It should include a meeting to agree the annual report and review the annual performance. There needs to be special meetings to agree changes of policy and guidance, to lead to Parliamentary statements so we know what is expected of the body. Chairmen and Chief Executives should get bonuses for outperformance, but should not be paid a bonus at all when performance is poor.

Esther Mc Vey was working from the Cabinet Office on improved accountability for these bodies when the election was suddenly called. That work needs to be revived by Ministers after the election.