

View from Westminster

Freedom Day, a concept that sounds like it's been lifted straight from Braveheart, has provoked a series of contradictory reflections. I'm sure many felt a sense of happiness witnessing youngsters getting their groove on in reopened nightclubs, whilst remaining uncomfortable with anyone coming within two metres. For now, at least, the real healthcare story in town isn't that aspect of Covid19. The 'pingdemic' has driven a text message and horses through staffing rotas, leading to queuing ambulances and hospitals again on the edge and for ADEPT members, disruption to waste services. Whilst the government and some of the public celebrate 'Victory over Covid' Day...the foot soldiers in what has been a difficult war with many casualties, steels itself for yet another battle. We feel a long way from clapping....

In Westminster, summer recess has rolled around again, albeit without the usual sense of joy that the occasion usually engenders. It's probably fair to say that you know its recess when Defra's lead story on their departmental website for some time last week was the publication of the quarterly egg production figures. Clearly this is an important matter that shouldn't be yoked about (I'll leave now), but it also perhaps reflects that we've reached the point of the parliamentary calendar where ministers head for sunny seaside locations to inspect backbenchers flood defence funding requests....

BEIS is not a regular visitor to this column, but it is worth flagging that the anticipated hydrogen strategy might finally drop within weeks. Expectations were raised when the Secretary of State indicated in a meeting that it would arrive sometime in the summer, leading to a flurry of speculation it would materialise before recess. As always in politics, it's the hope that kills you.... but there is now an expectation it will appear prior to MPs returning to the House in September. It's a big one for those involved in the environment and decarbonisation agendas and expect more commentary once it finally sees the light of day.

Things are slightly more chaotic over at Treasury, where the economically dry as dust Rishi Sunak is contemplating funding the incoming social care strategy with a national insurance rise. Naturally, the backbench is revolting at a proposal they find...well...revolting. However, given we have been waiting two years for a strategy Boris Johnson announced was oven ready as he entered Number 10 and we've just had a financially bankrupting global pandemic, it's fair to say Rishi has his hands tied. It's also fair to say that National Insurance would be more palatable to hike than income tax, although the young might be feeling aggrieved that they've just spent 12 months protecting the elderly only to now potentially face a fiscal clobbering to pay for care costs as well. Still, young people don't vote whereas older people do – hence the triple lock pension increase will probably also happen as well!

The Department for Transport meanwhile has been heavily involved with Foreign Office and Home Office discussions around the relaxation of quarantine rules for amber list countries. The lead announcement at the time of writing on the DfT website however concerned an upgrade to Teddington Railway Station. Proving once again either that all politics is local or that recess is in full swing.

