



# Political Intelligence: December 2021

## COP26

1st December saw a discussion on the outcome of COP26, with questions asked to Alok Sharma, COP President. Ed Miliband MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change and Net Zero questioned whether Sharma will ask the Secretary of State to rewrite the Australia trade deal as Australia's commitment is currently consistent with 4 degrees of warming, far above the global 1.5 degree goals, with the answer that the deal will include "a substantive chapter on climate change". A number of questions about fossil fuels were put forward, including whether the Cambo oil field, North of the Shetland Islands, and Cumbria coal mine plans would be scrapped - with the response that these were being independently reviewed.

A debate on Finance for Loss and Damage of COP27 saw Caroline Lucas, the only Green Party MP in the House of Commons, raise the disappointment felt by climate-vulnerable countries in the downgrading of the introduction of financial support functions to a dialogue. A number of follow-up questions on the same topic only received reiteration from Alok Sharma that it is groundbreaking to have a dialogue, but also that assurances have been agreed to make support for developing countries available.

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP and member of the Textiles and Fashion APPG, asked about plans to ensure the centring of indigenous people in climate change conversations. Alok Sharma highlighted that indigenous peoples' voices were amplified in the blue zone, and that the UK, along with others, worked to develop a pledge of \$1.7 billion to support indigenous peoples over the next 5 years.

## Written Questions:

### **Claudia Webbe MP and member of the Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion APPG, Clothing: Manufacturing Industries**

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, with reference to the oral evidence by the then Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility to the Environmental Audit Committee on 18 December 2018, whether he has plans to publish the outcomes of investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and/or national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.

2. Asked the BEIS Secretary of State, if he will publish the (a) scope and (b) nature of the investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and/or the national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.
3. If he will publish any recommendations, conclusions and findings from the investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and/or the national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.
4. What steps his Department has taken to implement recommendations arising from investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and the national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.
5. Which Government agencies were involved in the investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and the national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.
6. Whether prosecutions were made after the investigations into underpayment of the national minimum wage and/or the national living wage in Leicester's garment industry.
7. What steps his Department has taken to (a) improve working conditions and (b) ensure payment of at least the minimum wage in Leicester since the investigations into wage exploitation in Leicester's garment industry.

Paul Scully MP and Minister for Small Business, responded to all of the above with the same response as below:

“A multi-agency task force operated in Leicester for over a year to investigate allegations of widespread labour market non-compliance, including underpayment of National Minimum Wage. HMRC investigate the National Minimum Wage, but the taskforce also included the Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority, Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate, Health and Safety Executive, National Crime Agency, Leicestershire Police and Home Office Immigration Enforcement. The taskforce visited over 300 premises in the city to ensure compliance and also undertook a programme of community engagement in Leicester to encourage whistle-blowers to come forward. While the bodies involved remain vigilant, the activity undertaken so far has not uncovered evidence of widespread modern slavery.

HMRC have a number of open cases remaining and will continue to investigate based on intelligence and risk-modelling, sharing information as appropriate. Enforcement action will be considered according to the evidence. To date, HMRC have issued two Labour Market Enforcement Undertakings to employers in the Leicester garment industry. There have not been any criminal prosecutions. We cannot comment on ongoing investigations.”

### **Seema Malhotra MP, World Expo: Dubai**

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, how many businesses from the UK's (a)

hospitality, (b) retail and (c) leisure sector have exhibited in the UK's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai between 1 October and 14 December 2021.

Mike Freer MP, Under Secretary of State for Exports, response included: "The number of UK companies that have taken part in the DIT programme as speakers, panellists and providers of podcasts online and physically to date are: Fashion and Retail: 11, Creative Industries: 30"

**Lord Taylor of Warwick, Member of the Textiles and Fashion APPG, Business: Coronavirus**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have (1) to extend VAT relief, and (2) to reduce business rates, to support businesses implementing the new COVID-19 restrictions.

Lord Agnew of Oulton, Minister for the Cabinet Office, responded: "The reduced rate of VAT for hospitality and tourism has cost over £8 billion and will continue to support businesses until 31 March 2022. There are no plans to extend the length of this relief... All taxes are kept under review, but it is appropriate that the temporary tax reliefs are first reduced, and then removed, in order to strengthen and rebuild the public finances."

**Lord Jones of Cheltenham, Events Industry: Non-domestic rates**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, following the introduction of Plan B COVID-19 restrictions, what plans they have, if any, to provide 100 percent Business Rate Relief to the end of 2022/23 for all music venues.

Lord Agnew of Oulton's response highlighted: "The Government has provided unprecedented business rates support, worth £16 billion, for the retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors since the start of the pandemic... In recognition of longer-term challenges facing the high street, eligible retail, hospitality, and leisure businesses will receive a new temporary relief worth almost £1.7 billion in the year 2022-23."

**The Earl of Clancarty, Events Industry: Non-domestic rates**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have to provide 100 per cent business rate relief to the end of 2022/23 for all music venues, given the COVID-19 Plan B restrictions.

Lord Agnew of Oulton responded as above to Lord Jones of Cheltenham's question.

**Rachael Maskell MP, Retail Trade: Government Assistance**

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, what plans he has to support high streets to regenerate that have not benefited from Government funding to date.

Neil O'Brien MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Levelling Up, The Union and Constitution, responded: "Government has already committed billions of pounds to support economic growth and regeneration for high streets, including £3.6 billion through the Towns Fund and Future High Streets Fund. While some of this funding is already committed, there are further

forthcoming opportunities for additional funding: we are taking further concrete steps towards levelling up through initiatives including the new £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund, which will invest in infrastructure to improve everyday local life and boost growth and jobs, including through future rounds reaching more places. We will furthermore launch the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in 2022, and in preparation we have already supported places with £220 million through the UK Community Renewal Fund. The £150 million Community Ownership Fund, administered over four years, will help communities purchase and refurbish assets at risk of closure. Facilities including sports halls, cinemas, theatres, parks and shops are all covered by the fund that will run until 2024/25 and have at least eight bidding rounds... Beyond substantial funding offers, the Government is providing support to local leadership with the High Streets Task Force. Over five years this is providing hands-on support to local areas to develop data-driven innovative strategies and to connect local areas to relevant experts... In addition to this, the Build Back Better High Streets strategy published in July 2021 forms a key part of the Government's plan to level up and will deliver visible changes to local areas and communities across England... To address adaptation and reinvention of our high streets, we also introduced more flexibility into the planning systems in September 2020, through a new Commercial, Business and Service use class (Class E) which allows uses within it to change between these uses without the need for a planning application.”

#### **Seema Malhotra MP, Business: Coronavirus**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of new covid-19 restrictions on businesses in the (a) retail, (b) tourism and (c) hospitality sectors.

Paul Scully MP responded: “In order to support businesses through this next phase, the ‘Working Safely’ guidance will continue to provide advice on sensible precautions employers can take to manage risk and support their staff and customers. In other sectors, such as hospitality, the guidance says that businesses are exempt from enforcing customers to wear masks and this assessment has been made from a practical point of view given the nature of hospitality visits is to eat and drink.”

#### **Rachael Maskell MP, Shops: Carbon Emissions**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what steps he is taking to decarbonise shops on high streets.

Paul Scully MP responded: “The Government encourages all UK businesses with 500 employees or fewer to visit the UK Business Climate Hub and sign up to the globally recognised small business climate commitment. Businesses, including retail, gain access to a range of resources to help them achieve net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest.

Part of the commitment is disclosing progress on a yearly basis. To help businesses to report annually, they are now encouraged to use CDP’s new Climate Disclosure Framework.

In addition, the Government is also working closely with representatives across these sectors who have industry-wide net zero strategies. These include the British Retail Consortium who have published their Climate Action Roadmap and the industry-led Retail Sector Council who have produced an SME Green Guide.”

### **Elliot Colburn MP, Business: Coronavirus**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to help the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors recover from the covid-19 pandemic.

Lucy Frazer responded: “The Government has announced a new relief for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses worth almost £1.7 billion, to help support high streets.”

### **Dr Julian Lewis MP, Wholesale Trade: Government Assistance**

To ask the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, if he will take steps to ensure that wholesalers have access to the future (a) Covid-19 Additional Relief Fund and (b) Business Rates Relief Fund for businesses outside of the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors; if he will take steps to include specific reference to wholesalers in the guidance on eligibility to qualify for relief via each of those funds; and if he will list the measures being taken to support local businesses that fall outside of the hospitality, retail and leisure sectors.

Kemi Badenoch MP, Minister of State for Levelling Up Communities, responded: “The [£1.5 billion] COVID-19 Additional Relief Fund will be allocated to local authorities based on the stock of properties in the area whose sectors have been affected... My Department will publish guidance to help local authorities set up their local schemes once the legislation relating to COVID-19 Material Change of Circumstances provisions has passed. This will include the eligibility criteria for the scheme and individual local authority allocations. Decisions on the award of relief will ultimately be for local authorities, having regard to the guidance.”

## **Coronavirus:**

### **UK:**

As of 10th January 90% of people over the age of 12 have had their first vaccine dose, 83% have been double jabbed, and 62% have had a booster (third dose). Currently 18,665 people with coronavirus are in hospital in the UK. Plan B measures remain in place due to the Omicron variant, including the re-introduction of mandatory mask-wearing in shops and on transport.