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Restricting the sale of Tobacco:

Despite significant progress in driving down smoking rates over the past 40 years, smoking remains the leading cause of preventable illness and death. It causes around 150 cancer cases daily and kills one person every five minutes.

Those deaths are made more tragic by the fact that they are avoidable. Creating a smoke-free society would empower people to live happier, longer, and healthier lives, and substantially reduce pressure on our NHS.

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill proposes raising the age of sale for tobacco products, to prevent individuals born on or after 1 January 2009 from legally buying cigarettes in England. This would effectively raise the smoking age by one year, every year, until it applies to the whole population. Wider measures in the Bill include restricting the sale and marketing of e-cigarettes to children.

The Shadow Health and Social Care Secretary first proposed the smoking ban in January 2023 and has long argued for a ban on the sale, marketing and promoting of vapes to children.

I welcome and will support this Bill. It includes measures that my colleagues and I have long supported, and I am pleased ministers are following suit. I am only disappointed that the Prime Minister is allowing his own MPs a free vote, failing to convince them of the argument for these important reforms.

Cancer Research UK warns that England is almost a decade behind its target of a smoke-free society by 2030. I am concerned by the Government's lack of progress: NHS stop smoking services have suffered a 45% real-terms budget cut since 2015/16; and ministers opposed legislative amendments for the regulation of prices and profits of tobacco manufacturers and importers, with the funds raised used to reduce smoking prevalence.

Restricting the sale for tobacco products is welcome. But we also need bold measures to support current smokers to quit, to improve public health and build a healthier and fairer future. I recognise the value of public health measures that will help people live well for longer and I am committed to a long-term plan for reform of our health service, shifting the focus of care into the community, and putting prevention and early intervention at its heart.

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