

**Friday 29<sup>th</sup> October – For immediate release**

## **MPs more worried than the public about evidence U-turns**

Ahead of Evidence Week in Parliament 2021<sup>[ii](#)</sup>, Ipsos MORI research conducted with Sense about Science shows that many MPs believe that when the government changes its course of action, people lose confidence in its use of evidence. Yet the public themselves are just as likely to say that such changes of course make them more confident as make them lose confidence.

The surveys<sup>[iii](#)</sup>, which looked at the attitudes of MPs and the public to the way evidence is used to make decisions in a time of crisis, found that where 43% of MPs are more likely to agree that a change in course makes the public lose rather than gain confidence in the way the government uses evidence, just a third of the public agree that this applies to them (33%), while a similar proportion (34%) say it makes them more confident.

The survey also found a difference between MPs and the public over whether it's better to wait until all of the evidence is available before acting: 6 in 10 MPs (62%) think that it is better to act quickly, even if all the evidence is not yet available, whereas the public are evenly divided (38% prefer to act quickly, but 36% to wait for the evidence to be complete).

But their attitudes were similar on the importance of the public being able to see all of the evidence used to inform government actions in times of crisis: over 6 in 10 of both agreed with this (67% of MPs and 62% of the public).

### **Other findings from the survey include:**

- Older people (aged 55 – 75) are more inclined to favour acting quickly even if the evidence is not available (49%), compared to 36% of those aged 18 – 34.
- Around half of the public (53%) are not confident that the government had the right approach towards dealing with the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic during its early months. (Full results when asked if confident that the UK Government had the right approach towards dealing with the uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic in its early months. Very confident 11%, Fairly confident 28%, Not very confident 27%, Not confident at all 26%, Don't know 8%).
- But around half of the public (48%) are not confident that MPs have the ability and support they need to scrutinise the evidence behind the government's policy decisions.

Evidence Week in Parliament - which was initiated by the charity Sense about Science in 2018 and is held in partnership with the House of Commons Library and POST - opens on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> November with constituents questioning the chairs of Select Committees and other MPs about the way that parliament is using and scrutinising evidence in policy. It offers MPs rapid-fire briefings with leading UK researchers on the cutting-edge research that will help MPs to interrogate evidence for important issues and decisions.

Tracey Brown, director of Sense about Science said:

*“The past year has shown starkly the importance for Parliament of understanding evidence. COVID-19 is just one issue on an evidence-heavy agenda that sees MPs looking at conflicting models of hospital numbers in the morning, and debating post-Brexit food safety rules in the afternoon. Parliament acts both to scrutinise decisions for voters and as a warning system for how those decisions are affecting the country.*

*This makes big demands of accessing and understanding evidence quickly. This is why Evidence Week opens with the questions that are animating communities and constituents.”*

Kelly Beaver, Managing Director, Public Affairs at Ipsos MORI said:

*“Good use of evidence is of course crucial to good government, and something that’s valued by both public and MPs and policy-makers – we know from our previous work with Sense about Science that there are opportunities to improve this. And there is a broad consensus across MPs and the public that remains about the importance of transparency about the data being used to take decisions in government. This highlights the ongoing importance of public engagement in the evidence used for important decisions making, even in a time of crisis.”*

For more information on the survey or to attend Evidence Week in Parliament opening and briefings contact Hannah Lacey: [hannah@senseaboutscience.org](mailto:hannah@senseaboutscience.org) 07432 849547.

**\*\*Notes to editors\*\***

<sup>[i]</sup> [Evidence Week in Parliament](#) is being held in Upper Waiting Hall and online during 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> November. This event provides an opportunity for communities, decision makers and research bodies all over the UK to engage very directly with the work of Parliament. Evidence Week is a platform to discuss the need for sound evidence in policymaking as well as how to effectively scrutinise evidence in policy and suggest tools in which to do so. It launches on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> with an opening event that brings constituents to Parliament virtually to ask questions of MPs, committee chairs, and an expert panel. Throughout the week MPs, Peers, and Parliamentary staff will be accessing quick fire briefings through the evidence week platform on a range of topics – see the full list [here](#).

This event is carried out in collaboration with our partners: [POST](#) (Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology), [House of Commons Library](#), [Office for Statistics Regulation](#), [UK Statistics Authority](#), and [Ipsos MORI](#) with the support of the SciTech committee and our lead partner, the Institution of Physics.

**Evidence Week programme:**

- **Opening event**

Monday 1 November 2021 - 17:00 to 18:30 [Online](#)

- **Live exhibition – Upper Waiting Hall (in Parliament)**

Tuesday 2 November 2021 - 10:00 to 17:00

Wednesday 3 November 2021 - 10:00 to 17:00

- **Researcher Speed Briefings ([online](#))**

Available online throughout 1-5 November

- **Event**

Tuesday 2 November 13:00 to 14.00 - Panel discussion hosted by Centre for Homelessness Impact: ‘Are we on track to end rough sleeping in England by 2024?’ - Online

Wednesday 3 November 10:00 to 12:00 – A guided tour by CompBioMed - Bringing Virtual Humans to UK Healthcare – Attlee Suite in Parliament

- **Parliamentary Staff Training**

Friday 5 November 13:00-15:30- Hosted by: UKSA & OSR; Ipsos MORI; Making Sense of Risk Project

***View the full programme on the [Evidence Week website](#)***

For any other queries regarding Evidence Week or attending the event, please contact: Hannah, Senior Communications Officer on 07825 814826 or [hannah@senseaboutscience.org](mailto:hannah@senseaboutscience.org)

**Full list of briefings**

- Contribution of Physics to Net Zero (*Institute of Physics*) Plants and microbes that can combat climate change (*John Innes Centre*)
- The basis of public support for climate policies (*Taylor & Francis*)
- Digital copies of our cities to predict when infrastructure fails (*University of Bristol*)
- Personalised medical data to revolutionise healthcare (*CompBioMed – University College London*)
- Monitor antimicrobial resistance in the environment (*Society for Applied Microbiology*)
- Reliable data about our food supply (*University of Lincoln & Food Standards Authority*)
- How to work out the UK's geothermal energy potential (*British Geological Survey*)
- How to generate evidence when little is known – insights from the pandemic (*National Institute for Health Research*)
- An evidence base to end homelessness (*Centre for Homelessness Impact*)
- See the Harwell net-zero living laboratory (*UK Research and Innovation*)
- The data needed to simulate remanufacturing (*University of Exeter*)
- Monitor whether industry supply chains are decarbonising (*Imperial College London*)
- Youth employment prospects after mental health problems (*London School of Economics*)

**If you would like more information from the individual researchers, we would be more than happy to pass on their details.**

**MPs Quotes:**

“Rigorous evidence is an essential part of policymaking.” Chi Onwurah, MP

“My role as an MP is to scrutinise the decisions of the UK Government as well as to consider, and understand, issues that affect my constituents in Ceredigion. In times of increasing populism and contestation in politics, I need no convincing that receiving reliable information is vital to ensure well-informed policy-making. Evidence Week has played an important role in recent years in making sure that MPs have access to the best tools and information to hold the government to account.” - Ben Lake MP

<sup>[iii]</sup> Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative sample of 1,078 British adults aged 18-75, using its online Ipsos Digital omnibus, between 5-7 October 2021. Data are weighted to the known offline population proportions for age, gender, working status, education, social grade and region. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error. Interviews with 81 MPs were conducted by Ipsos MORI via telephone between 17<sup>th</sup> June – 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021. Quotas and weighting were used so results reflect the House of Commons by ministerial status within political party. Broad sample controls were also set on region and gender.