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- Social media and mental health conference set to take place

17 Feb 2017



A conference on how social media can help young people access mental health support in Scotland is to take place on Monday.

The event will bring together social media organisations, MSPs, experts and charities to explore how online firms can do more to assist those seeking information on psychological matters.

It has been co-organised by Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs and Twitter, and will be attended by both leader Ruth Davidson and mental health minister Maureen Watt.

The Edinburgh event was organised after Mr Briggs called on social media firms to offer free mental health advertising on their platforms last October.

That sparked contact between the Lothians MSP and Twitter, with the firm saying it will support the best campaign ideas which emerge on the day.

## **Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs said:**

“Last year I called for social media companies to offer free advertising for mental health organisations so more of our young people would know where to access mental health information and support.

“Surveys have shown the vast majority of youngsters don’t know how or where to access such support.

“I am delighted Twitter took up my call and have worked with me to arrange this event.

“It will bring together mental health charities, youth organisations, academics, design experts, MSPs and the Scottish Government.

“It’s brilliant news that Twitter has pledged to support the best campaigns that come out of the day, ensuring they will reach young people across Scotland and potentially inspire other ideas around the UK and beyond.”

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**DAY** – Monday, February 20, 2017

**TIME** – 10am-4pm

**PLACE** – The Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh EH1 2NE

All media are invited to attend. Both Miles and Ruth will be available for interview and photographs.

Miles urged social media firms to do more to help youngsters coping with mental health challenges last year:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/10/social-media-firms-should-offer-free-mental-health-adverts/>

For more information on the event visit:

<https://blog.twitter.com/en-gb/2017/how-can-social-media-help-address-mental-health-public-policy-goals>

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## [Staff shortages see troubled police call centre pay £4k a week in overtime](#)

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- Staff shortages see troubled police call centre pay £4k a week in overtime

17 Feb 2017



Police Scotland have forked out more than £4000 a week in overtime payments for a troubled call-handling centre since it absorbed the work of two other facilities.

The Bilston Glen centre, which was at the centre of the M9 tragedy controversy, took on the work of other facilities in Stirling and Glenrothes in April 2015.

And since then, more than £350,000 has been paid to police staff working overtime to fill gaps in the rota and deal with the increased demand.

The Scottish Conservatives, who obtained the data through Freedom of Information, said it proved the centre has been inadequately resourced from the start, and another example of bad forward-planning by the SNP.

It reveals overtime payments at Bilston Glen reached £289,728 in 2015/16, and £60,852 so far in 2016/17.

John Yuill and Lamara Bell died in 2015 when the car they were travelling in crashed off the M9.

And despite the car's location being reported to the single force's 101 number, it took three days for officers to arrive at the scene.

The delay was blamed on problems with logging calls at Bilston Glen, where staff complained of a lack of resources and insufficient training.

The Scottish Government was also accused of ignoring warnings about resources in call-handling centres for up to 18 months before the tragedy hit.

**Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:**

"Everyone accepts some overtime payments will be necessary in facilities the size of Bilston Glen.

"However, the sheer scale of these points to a major problem with staffing and resources there.

"If the Scottish Government had ensured these facilities were properly staffed to begin with, there wouldn't be a requirement for additional payments of this magnitude.

"The SNP was warned about this in advance of centralising these units, but as usual ignored them completely.

"Now we see the financial cost of that, not to mention a reduction in performance which has resulted in extremely damaging publicity for Police Scotland.

"This is something the Scottish Government needs to get under control as a matter of urgency."

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To see a copy of the Freedom of Information request, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/17-0045-Data.pdf>

Resources at the Bilston Glen facility came under the spotlight following the M9 tragedy:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/09/ruth-snp-ignored-call-centre-warnings-for-18-months/>

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/11/report-reveals-police-call-handling-failings/>

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# Mackay was warned about business rates crisis – and did nothing

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- Mackay was warned about business rates crisis – and did nothing

16 Feb 2017



The SNP government was warned about business rates increases last year – but did nothing to help.

Leading business groups wrote to finance secretary Derek Mackay as early as October 2016 spelling out the damaging impact the revaluation would have on hotels, pubs and businesses in Scotland.

The British Hospitality Association said it would have a “severe impact” and “likely lead to an increase in rateable values, and rates payable, by hotels of between 30 and 50 per cent”.

And in November, the Scottish Retail Consortium warned a Holyrood committee: “It will be very difficult to absorb some of the potential costs.”

Cosla even offered to help the Scottish Government do some modelling work on the rates rise, an offer it said “has not been taken up”.

However, the SNP’s response was to insist the revaluation had nothing to do with the Scottish Government – and is still refusing to act in order to help.

The Scottish Conservatives are today repeating their call for Mr Mackay to make a statement to Holyrood next week, and to order an immediate review of the revaluation before it comes into effect.

The party has also slammed Mr Mackay’s comments in the press this morning, when he insisted it was for councils, not central government, to respond.

**Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:**

“Business groups were warning about the impact of this revaluation last year.

“Yet, from the very start, the SNP’s response has been to pass the buck and insist it is nothing to do with them.

“It is a complete abdication of responsibility.

“Once again, we see a Scottish Government so obsessed with its campaign for independence that it has fallen asleep at the wheel on the issues that actually matter to people.

“Derek Mackay this morning has once again washed his hands of the matter and declared that it is for councils to act.

“This is from the man who has an extra £500m to spend next year, and who found nearly £200m down the back of the sofa two weeks ago in order to do a deal with the Greens.

“Mr Mackay should come before parliament to set out a clear statement that he will review this revaluation process before it is too late for firms which face going to the wall.

“Anything else will show that this SNP government has lost touch entirely with a crisis it knew was coming – but ignored.”

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The SNP government was repeatedly warned by business groups about the crisis, most prominently by the British Hospitality Association.

### **British Hospitality Association**

‘The 2017 rates revaluation in Scotland is likely to lead to an increase in rateable values, and rates payable, by hotels of between 30-50%. BHA has challenged this with the Assessors and has made known to the Scottish Government its concern over the impact of this on the profitability and sustainability of hotel businesses’ (*British Hospitality Association*, 18 October 2016, [link](#)).

### **William Macleod, British Hospitality Association**

‘BHA is concerned, from what is known about the impact on hospitality and hotel businesses of the potentially severe impact of the 2017 revaluation that TR is likely to be required in the hospitality sector to allow businesses to cope with significant (between 30-50%) increases in rates’ (*William Macleod, British Hospitality Association – Consultation Response: 2017 Non-domestic rating revaluation – consultation on possible transitional arrangements*, [link](#))

### **Councillor Keenan COSLA**

‘More than a year ago, we made an offer to the Government that we would do modelling work on business rates, because we realise that there would need to be some equalising factor across areas, as some industrial areas can raise much more. We would look to do that work but, because that opportunity has not been taken up, we are probably a year or so behind where we could be. If that joint work was going on, we would have an indication of where the figures are.’ (Local Government and Communities Committee Official Report, 28 September 2016, [link](#)).

### **David Lonsdale, Scottish Retail Consortium**

‘Committee members will know some of our gripes about business rates, the large business supplement and the apprenticeship levy—I have a large list

that I can bore the committee with at a later date, if you like. There will be some genuine challenges if retailers are to absorb some of those costs, so they will be looking for sharper deals with suppliers to see whether they can get a better price. They will also be shopping around, just as we advocate that consumers do, to see whether they can get the same quality of produce at better prices. As I said, it will be very difficult to absorb some of the potential costs, but it will be difficult to pass them on to consumers, given the current climate and the stiff competition out there.’ (Official Report, *Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee*, 24 November 2016, p18, [link](#))

### **Scottish Retail Consortium**

‘It is far from clear why firms operating in Scotland should pay more in rates than firms in comparable premises elsewhere in the UK, particularly when many have options over where to invest elsewhere in the UK or indeed abroad. Next year’s rise in the headline poundage rate for all other firms should also be shelved. After all, stimulating business investment is more difficult when costs are rising as it means diverting cash and resources away from growing the business The SRC supports the principle behind the new local discretionary rates relief in the interim period prior to fundamental rates reform. It is a welcome acknowledgement of the need to keep down costs for business. However, we remain to be convinced that its use by councils will either be widespread or substantive enough to be effective’ (Scottish Retail Consortium, *retail industry recommendations for the Scottish Government for its Budget & Spending review* 1 August 2016, p6, [link](#))

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## **[Ruth: A free-trading Britain can face down SNP plans for break-up](#)**

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- Ruth: A free-trading Britain can face down SNP plans for break-up

13 Feb 2017



An “outward-looking, free-trading” Britain can provide people across the UK with the security and opportunity they crave, Ruth Davidson will say in a keynote speech this evening.

Saying the country must reject the path of “economic nationalism”, she will set out a vision for a country that “pushes at our boundaries, instead of building walls”.

And while the SNP has sought to use the UK's vote to leave the EU as reason to ramp up its campaign for another referendum, Ruth will say that – in contrast – it has made the case for Scottish independence “weaker and more illogical than ever”.

Nonetheless, she will say the UK needs to face up to an SNP government which has watched the tactics of the Leave campaign, learned from them, and is now “itching to get its own campaign bus into gear”.

She will say that a key argument against independence will be on trade – pointing to how Scotland's trade with the UK is worth four times that of exports to the EU.

Voting to leave the UK in response to Brexit would be akin to “stubbing your toe, to then amputate your foot”.

In tonight's address, she will also say it's vital politicians respect the result of referendums, and had Scotland voted for separation in 2014, she wouldn't have denied it nor demanded a re-run.

**Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

“The SNP is a formidable political operation which – I suspect – has learnt from the tactics of the Leave campaign last year and is itching to get its own campaign bus into gear as we speak.

“So my view is that the case for the Union must be made afresh, and we have to persuade people once again that our own Union of nations still works for us all.

“And there is something of a Brexit paradox here.

“Because while Brexit has provided the means for Nicola Sturgeon to crank up her independence campaign once more – it has also made that case weaker and more illogical than ever.

“As we learned only last month in official Scottish Government statistics, trade within the UK internal market is worth four times to Scotland than trade with the EU.

“The logic is therefore clear.

“If everyone in Scotland agrees that free trade with Europe is important – and we do – it is literally impossible to deny that trade with the rest of the UK matters four times as much.

“But rather than accept that logic, the same old nationalist contortions are applied.

“It is already cranking up the grievance machine in an attempt to push people towards the exit door.”

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# [Ruth calls for immediate review of revaluation of business rates](#)

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- Ruth calls for immediate review of revaluation of business rates

12 Feb 2017



Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson has written to the First Minister calling on her to launch an urgent review into the revaluation of business rates.

It comes after Ruth was inundated with letters from businesses across Scotland who are facing huge increases in their rates, with some now having to pay four times more than they did previously.

A full scale reform plan for the business rates system is currently being prepared by former RBS executive, Ken Barclay.

However, firms and trade bodies are warning that the revaluation will come into force prior to that plan, and that an emergency review separate to that is therefore required.

One business owner complained that the hike in rates was “unsustainable for a small business and proves yet again how those in authority are divorced from reality.” Another said the rise in their business rates would inevitably lead “to the slow death of our business.”

It points to a growing crisis facing many small businesses, that if not addressed, could lead to closures and job losses.

In her letter Ruth also asked Nicola Sturgeon to heed the warning of the Scottish Tourism Alliance, who this week voiced their concerns about the increase in rates facing some businesses.

They too have called on the SNP to review the ‘disproportionate valuations being imposed’ on many businesses.

**Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

“Over the past few days I have been inundated with letters from businesses who are worried and angry about the impending rise in their rates.

“Some of them are facing three or four fold increases which is the difference between them making a profit, and having to close down.



"These shops, hotels and restaurants are vital to our economy, providing much needed jobs in many areas of the country, and we cannot afford to see them simply go out of business.

"That's why I've called on Nicola Sturgeon to listen to the voices of these businesses and the Scottish Tourism Alliance and launch an urgent review into these rate increases.

"The amounts that are being asked for are clearly unsustainable and if immediate action is not taken then we risk seeing a huge amount of damage done to our economy."

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A pdf of the letter sent to the First Minister can be found here:  
[www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Letter-to-FM-business-rates.pdf](http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Letter-to-FM-business-rates.pdf)

Below are some excerpts of the letters received by Ruth regarding the increase in business rates:

*"I very much hope that you will be able to convince the powers-that-be to re-think these exorbitant rises. If they are imposed, I have no doubt that many people will be forced out of business which will lead to even greater redundancies, These rises must be reconsidered."*

**The Ship Inn, Stonehaven**

*"The new Rateable Value produced by the revaluation process is proposed as £27,200. This will take us above the threshold for the Small Business Bonus Scheme's Rural Relief giving us a Non Domestic Rates bill of £12,675.20 from 2017/18. A 338% increase on 2016/17. Without action many small, particularly rural, businesses face a difficult or bleak future. In turn many areas of Scotland, particularly rural areas, will face job losses and a contraction of the local economy."*

**Argyll Hotel, Cambeltown**

*"No one doubted a rates rise, but these rises are unsustainable and cannot be absorbed by our businesses or passed onto our customers. Most of us are owner-occupiers of small businesses who took the premises on because we could make a living from them. With such extreme rate rises this will no longer be the case. Re-investment in our businesses will be extremely difficult with knock-on effects on staff morale, customer satisfaction and ultimately turnover. Local job losses or closure is our only recourse. As business owners we all share a common optimism but on this occasion we all agree that the impending rate rises will result in a slow death for our businesses."*

**Reds Restaurant, Portobello**

*"After speaking to other business owners locally, I have found many similarly minded to me. We now reluctantly have to look at our options, and if financially things do not ease, we may have to close the business after the final three years of our lease and hand the hotel back to our landlord as we will be unable to make the required investment in the property to secure its*

*future. At the point that we return the hotel to the landlord, I believe that the hotel will close permanently which will result in the loss of 30 jobs locally, and this is down to the final nail which is the business rates increase..."*

**Stotfield Hotel, Lossiemouth**

The letter from the Scottish Tourism Alliance to Nicola Sturgeon regarding business rates can be found [here](#).