

Growing demand for Universal Credit roll-out to be halted.

7th September 2017

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Today, Interim Labour leader Alex Rowley will lead a debate in the Scottish Parliament supporting calls for the roll-out to be halted.

Alex called for the roll-out of Universal Credit to be halted earlier in the summer.

Scottish Labour deputy leader Alex Rowley has demanded that Tory plans to roll-out Universal Credit are halted...

<https://t.co/YeAVx2JTbH>

– Edinburgh Central (@CentralCLP) [July 31, 2017](#)

Charities and individuals across civic Scotland have also united to call on the rollout to be halted.

Today Scotland's third sector has come together to call for a halt to the roll out of Universal Credit <https://t.co/RpugkG742m>

[#HaltandFixUC](#) pic.twitter.com/BcRVyuBdz3

– Citizens Advice Scot (@CitAdviceScot) [August 31, 2017](#)

Universal Credit, which will replace six existing benefits, is supposed to make access to social security payments less complicated. It has been rolled out in parts of Scotland and is due to be introduced in full across the country by the end of 2018 – starting this October. But there are particular concerns about the six-week waiting period for payments at the start of the process.

Since Universal Credit was introduced, Citizens Advice Scotland evidence in initial roll-out areas shows:

- A 15 per cent rise in rent arrears issues compared to a national decrease of 2 per cent.
- An 87 per cent increase in Crisis Grant issues compared to a national increase of 9 per cent.
- Two of five bureaux in impacted areas have seen a 40 per cent and a 70 per cent increase in advice about access to food banks advice, compared to a

national increase of 3 per cent.

Read more about our plans for a fairer Social Security system [here](#).

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[Lesley Laird's letter to the Secretary of State for Scotland](#)

Shadow Scottish Secretary, Lesley Laird, has written to David Mundell with three demands over the Joint-Ministerial Committee.

In the letter, which was sent on 1st September, Laird outlines three demands:

- That a JMC is convened within the next three weeks i.e. by the end of week commencing 22nd September.
- That the Secretary of State agrees to regular reporting and publishing of matters relevant to the JMC from the Brexit negotiations as they pertain to Scotland and other devolved nations.
- That the Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, Lesley Laird, attends the JMC meetings to ensure that opposition parties have input into the process

The full text of the letter is below:

The Rt Hon David Mundell MP

*Scotland Office
Dover House
London
SW1A
2AU*

1 September 2017

Dear David

I am writing to express my concerns around the Conservative Government's

handling of the Brexit process and in particular, the lack of opportunity for devolved administrations to contribute to the UK Government's negotiating position.

The Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) on Europe met four times between October 2016 and February 2017. However, since the collapse of the NI Assembly, the JMC has not met. This means that by the time Parliament returns next week, the JMC will not have met in around seven months.

Given that Article 50 was triggered in March, and the first round of negotiations began in June, this lack of engagement and dialogue is unacceptable and is failing the people of Scotland as well as those from other parts of the UK. By failing to call meetings of the JMC your Government is failing to deal with these critical matters in an open and transparent way and is excluding Scotland and other devolved administrations from having their voice heard and inputting into the Brexit process via the JMC.

This is a situation that does not best serve our democratic process nor indeed does it meet the spirit of the intent to establish the JMC in the first place.

My understanding is that the position of the Government is that while there is no devolved legislator in Northern Ireland, the JMC cannot be convened as Northern Ireland cannot be represented. While I see the logic, I can't support a situation that has resulted in the other devolved administrations being unable have their voices heard in an official capacity.

I am also concerned at your apparent lack of involvement in the JMC and would ask that you press the Prime Minister to allow you to be present at any meeting concerning Scotland.

In order to try and restore some kind of level of credibility to the JMC I would urge you to take forward the following actions.

1. Ensure that a JMC is convened within the next three weeks i.e. by the end of week commencing 22 September.
2. That you agree to a regular reporting and publishing of matters relevant to the JMC from the Brexit negotiations as they pertain to Scotland and other devolved nations.
3. Allow me the opportunity to attend the JMC to ensure that Scottish Labour have input into this process.

The clock is ticking on the Brexit process it is imperative that you act now to establish a credible way in which the JMC can operate effectively and ensure the voices of the devolved nations are heard.

I look forward to hearing from you on these issues.

Yours sincerely

Lesley Laird MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland

[Alex Rowley's Programme for Government speech](#)

Presiding Officer,

Can I too welcome everyone back to parliament.

And can I congratulate all who were involved in the construction and design of the Queensferry Crossing, that magnificent new bridge linking the wonderful Kingdom of Fife and the Lothians.

It was good to be at the official opening yesterday and I do hope more members of this place will venture across the Forth to sample the delights of Fife.

I also want to congratulate all the workers involved in the building of the Aircraft Carriers. The HMS Prince of Wales will have its naming ceremony in Rosyth this Friday and well done to everyone involved.

The First Minister in her speech today has announced an extensive programme for her government and she will be looking for support across this chamber. I want to be clear, Labour will not oppose for the sake of opposing and we will work constructively with the government where it is in the best interests of the people of Scotland.

Equally, I hope the government for its part will be more open to working with others and be open to listening to other ideas and opinions.

She has listened to us and agreed to lift the public sector pay cap.

This is to be welcomed.

And her plan to launch a national investment bank to boost our economy is also good news. This, like scrapping the pay cap, was part of Labour's general election manifesto.

Unfortunately, however, without a Labour Government in Westminster, it won't have the £20 billion of lending power to get it started, but we welcome it all the same.

We will be looking for complete transparency in how it is set up – and who is put in charge of what should be a vital part of Scotland's economic infrastructure.

However, it seems that in other areas the government's ears are closed to advice, ideas and experience.

Carrying on with the poor education governance reforms which have been criticised by all in the sector is pure dogmatic politics.

The First Minister has often said she wants to be judged on what her government does to improve our education system.

So let's just remind ourselves of a few facts.

Over 4,000 fewer teachers than when the SNP came to power.

1,000 fewer support staff than when the SNP came to power.

Classes sizes bigger than when the SNP came to power.

Spending per pupil across all ages down.

If pupil spend had remained at 2010/11 levels, primary schools would be £726 million better off and secondary schools would be £308 million better off.

I cannot see how what is being proposed today addresses any of this. Indeed, it seems to me it is a classic avoidance technique – when in doubt re-structure.

It did not work for Police Scotland, it did not work for Fire and Rescue, it did not work for our colleges and it will not work for our schools.

Presiding Officer, I have used much of the summer recess to meet and listen to as many people as possible.

The teachers I spoke with over the summer told me about the impact of cuts in schools and in classrooms, workloads that have them completely run off their feet, class sizes that are far too large, the need for more teaching assistants and they told me about not having the basic materials to be able to provide the teaching and learning of the quality that we need.

Most of this is a direct result of a severe shortage of funding for education. This is what you have to address First Minister.

Taking control of education from our councils won't address any of these issues.

And that brings me to local government.

We must recognise that local councils are on the front line of supporting people suffering from failed Tory austerity.

Local councils lead on planning and economic development, health and social care, protecting our environment, the education of our children and the health and wellbeing of our communities.

The obsession of this SNP Government to centralise local government has got to stop.

The willingness to pass on Tory austerity to local public services has got to stop.

The government must change course, must build a new partnership with local councils, one built on mutual respect, understanding and joined up planning to tackle the big issues in our communities.

And one which is built on funding local services properly. There will be a budget coming soon and this government cannot, once again, pass on Tory austerity to our councils.

Again I say I hope she really is listening to others.

For it is time to use the powers of this parliament to pay for a fairer, more equal society and to support our public services.

Time to introduce a 50p top rate of income tax and have an honest discussion with the people of Scotland to show that those who can afford to pay a bit more should do so.

And scrap the unfair council tax as she once promised to do. For no amount of tinkering with the bands will make it any fairer.

And while they say they will lift the public sector pay cap it – let us be clear – it cannot be done on the back of cutting even more from public services. It must be paid for.

I have listened to hundreds of people this summer – at street stalls, coffee mornings and on the door steps. It should not be a surprise to the First Minister, that people right across Scotland are very concerned about the

state of our National Health Service.

We have an NHS workforce crisis. Today new figures showed how bad it is. Nursing and midwife vacancies are up, consultant vacancies are up and 400 operations were cancelled in July.

I am not sure anything she said today is going to tackle this.

For the hundreds queuing outside GP practices trying to get an appointment, the people being removed from lists, those trapped in hospitals, those on waiting lists for care packages, waiting lists for operations, waiting to see specialists or seeking mental health support, will this programme of government bring change for them?

It should also not be a surprise that people were raising the problems of housing. Shelter says Scotland has a 'Housing Crisis'.

And I agree. So too do the tens of thousands on council house waiting lists, the homeless and the children who leave school each day with no home to call their own.

I have welcomed the government's commitment to build 50,000 affordable homes, but I say again we need a National House Build Strategy to ensure it happens. We cannot allow this housing crisis to continue.

And that brings me to skills, apprenticeships and jobs. In nearly every sector of our economy we have major skills gaps.

Our ambition must surely be a high skill, high wage economy.

And yet we currently have 71,000 people on zero hours contracts, there are 40,000 agency workers in Scotland with little security of work, a figure that is predicted to rise significantly unless something is done.

So we will work with the government on the measures they have announced today but it must be more than warm words.

Will she listen to us and consider Labour's proposals for an industrial strategy for Scotland? Actions speak louder than words and it is actions we need.

And talking of actions, we have worked with the government on its Child Poverty Bill. I do hope it will agree to establish an independent statutory Poverty and Inequality Commission for Scotland.

Setting child poverty targets is one thing, but it is action that is needed to tackle child poverty.

Again, listen to Labour – use the powers of this parliament to increase child benefit by £5 a week to lift more than 30,000 children out of poverty over the next three years. Actions speak louder than words.

And listen to Labour – drop the proposal for a 50 per cent cut in Air Passenger Duty. This would cost the Scottish tax payer nearly £190 million. Drop that idea and invest the money in tackling poverty.

Presiding Officer, there are positive measures in the government's programme today, but there are still huge challenges facing Scotland that are not addressed. We will work with the government where we can, we will hold them to account and we will bring forward the ideas to tackle the big challenges for Scotland.

10 Labour policies that 'inspired' the SNP Programme for Government...

5th September 2017

10 Labour policies that 'inspired' the SNP Programme for Government...

1. A soft opt-out Organ Donation Bill has been a Labour Member's Bill in this and the previous sitting of the Scottish Parliament. Last year SNP MSPs voted against an opt-out Bill brought forward by Anne McTaggart.
2. Free access to sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities is part of a Member's Bill from Monica Lennon.
3. An end to rough sleeping was in Labour's 2017 manifesto, and it was the last Labour led Scottish government that passed world leading legislation aimed at ending homelessness in 2003.
4. Labour has attempted multiple Member's Bills to reregulate buses in Scotland.
5. Labour proposed a publicly owned People's ScotRail in our 2016 manifesto – a step further than the SNP's commitment to a public sector bid.
6. A Pupil equity fund is Labour's Fair Start Fund – first proposed in 2015.
7. Labour proposed a Scottish Investment Bank in our 2017 manifesto- with £20 billion of lending power behind it.
8. Labour supported the Frank's Law campaign in our 2017 manifesto –but would have gone further and scrapped charges regardless of age, and not just for those with prescribed conditions.
9. Labour councillors already started work on exploring a basic income in Glasgow, Fife and North Ayrshire.
10. Scrapping the public sector pay cap was a Labour manifesto pledge – and one the SNP voted against in the spring.

...and five that didn't...

1. No commitment to using the tax powers to end austerity
2. No plan to use the powers of the parliament to increase Child Benefit.
3. No pledge to ban fracking.
4. No plan to scrap the unfair Council Tax.
5. No commitment to drop a second referendum on independence.