

Teresa Pearce responds to NAO report on 100 per cent business rate retention scheme

Teresa Pearce, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, responding to the National Audit Office report on the 100 per cent business rate retention scheme, said:

“Today’s report confirms what we have long suspected: the Government is playing dangerous games with local government finances, and in turn, is putting our vital public services in jeopardy.

“The NAO have stated that implementing 100 per cent business rates retention before the Government’s Fair Funding Review has been published will result in an untested and potentially unfair system being imposed on already struggling councils. In the context of seven years of brutal and relentless cuts to local government, that is a risk that councils cannot afford. That is why Labour has continually called for 100 per cent business rate retention to be delayed until after the Fair Funding Review is complete.

“The report also finds that the research has not been done into whether business rate retention is genuinely driving economic growth, and the resources do not exist to do so sufficiently. As it stands, this scheme is ideologically-driven but lacks any solid evidence base.

“Local government is facing a £5.8billion funding gap by 2020. There is a national crisis in social care with 1.2million frail elderly people and one in five vulnerable disabled people being left lonely and isolated. Libraries, youth centres and Sure Start centres have closed. Child protection services are creaking, and homelessness is rising. Public services provided by local councils are the lifeblood of our communities and the Government must think more carefully before implementing these potentially catastrophic changes.”

The Government should tackle 'burning injustices' many young people face & get on with helping young people find a job – Debbie Abrahams

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, commenting on the Work and Pensions Select Committee's report on the youth obligation, said:

"The current headline employment figures mask shocking barriers faced by some groups in our society trying to find a job. Sadly there is even evidence of direct discrimination."

"The Government's own statistics show a wide gap in employment between different regions, and the evidence points to major disadvantages faced by women, BME groups and disabled people."

"The Government should stop patting themselves on the back, fix their broken Universal Credit roll out, tackle the 'burning injustices' many young people face and get on with helping young people find a job."

Jeremy Corbyn statement to the House on the triggering of Article 50

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Speaker,

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for the advance copy of her statement.

Today we embark on the country's most important negotiations in modern times.

The British people made the decision to leave the European Union and Labour

respects that decision.

The next steps along this journey are the most crucial and if the Prime Minister is to unite this country, as she says she aims to do the Government needs to listen, consult and represent the whole country, not just the hard-line Tory ideologues on her own benches.

Britain is going to change as a result of leaving the European Union. The question is how. The Conservatives want to use Brexit to turn our country into a low wage tax haven.

Labour is determined to invest in a high skill, high tech, high wage future, to rebuild and transform Britain, so no one and no community is left behind.

Mr Speaker, the direction the Prime Minister is threatening to take this Country is both reckless and damaging and Labour will not give this Government a free hand to use Brexit to attack rights and protections, cut services and create a tax dodgers' paradise.

So let me be clear, the Prime Minister says that no deal is better than a bad deal but the reality is; no deal is a bad deal.

Less than a year ago the Treasury estimated that leaving the European Union on World Trade Organisation terms would lead to a 7.5 per cent fall in GDP and a £45 billion loss of tax receipts.

Has the Treasury updated those figures or do they still stand? If updated, can they be published? If not, what deal could be worse than those consequences of 'no deal'?

It would be a national failure of historic proportions if the Prime Minister comes back from Brussels without having secured protection for jobs and living standards.

So we will use every parliamentary opportunity to ensure the Government is held to account at every stage of the negotiations.

Mr
Speaker,

We
all have an interest in ensuring the Prime Minister gets the best deal for
this
country.

To
safeguard jobs and living standards Britain needs full access to the single
market.

The
Secretary of State for exiting the EU seems to agree with this. He stated in
this House on 24 January the Government's plan is a:

"comprehensive free trade
agreement and a comprehensive customs agreement that will deliver the exact
same benefits as we have"

That
is what they have pledged. So will the Prime Minister confirm today, that she
intends to deliver a trade and customs agreement with "the exact same
benefits"?

The
same goes for protecting workers' rights and environmental standards,
protecting Britain's nations and regions, protecting Britain's financial
sector
and services and making sure there is no return to a hard border in Northern
Ireland.

And
when does she expect to be able to guarantee the rights of all those EU
nationals who live, work and contribute to this country?

And
for those British nationals who live in the EU, including guaranteeing their
UK
pensions will not be frozen post-Brexit?

Mr
Speaker, Brexit would be a huge task for any government.

Yet
so far they seem utterly complacent about the scale of the task ahead and
government ministers can't make up their minds about their real objectives.

The
Foreign Secretary said in October: "Our policy is having our cake and
eating it."

Today

the Chancellor said: "We can't have our cake and eat it."

These might seem flippant exchanges from ministers, but these reflect serious differences about Britain's negotiating aims.

The Government must speak with a united voice.

The Foreign Secretary is the same man who promised our NHS £350 million pounds a week once we left the EU.

Now he believes that leaving the EU without a deal would be "perfectly ok".

It would not be "perfectly OK". It would damage our economy and people's living standards.

Will the Prime Minister confirm she rejects such complacency?

Labour has set out our tests for this Government's Brexit negotiations

And we will use all means possible to make sure we hold the Government to their word on full access to the single market, on protecting Britain from being dragged into a race to the bottom, and ensuring our future relationship with the EU is strong and co-operative.

A relationship where we can work together to bring prosperity and peace to our continent.

If the Prime Minister can deliver a deal that meets our tests, we will back her.

More than ever, Britain needs a government that will deliver for the whole country, not just the few.

And that is the ultimate test of the Brexit deal that the Prime Minister must now secure.

Ends

The Government must urgently provide assurances about the future of Moorside – Rebecca Long-Bailey

Rebecca Long-Bailey, Shadow Secretary of State for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, commenting on the bankruptcy of Westinghouse said:

“This announcement throws into doubt the Moorside new nuclear plant that could create 20,000 jobs in Cumbria.

“Questions have been raised over Toshiba’s role in Moorside for some time.

“When Westinghouse’s viability was first called into question, Labour said the Government should step in to underwrite the company’s investment if the project was at significant risk of collapsing. Unfortunately, the Government dragged its heels.

“The Government must now urgently provide assurances about the future of Moorside. Relying on the private sector alone, in absence of a robust contractual legal structure, has failed.

“If this government is at all serious about delivering its industrial strategy, it must act swiftly to ensure the security of our energy supply and guarantee the creation of thousands of highly-skilled and well-paid jobs that communities in Cumbria need and deserve.”

Labour is determined to ensure we can rebuild and transform Britain – Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn, Leader of the Labour Party, speaking ahead of the triggering of Article 50, said:

“Today, we embark on the country’s most important negotiations in modern times.

"The British people made the decision to leave the European Union and Labour respects that decision.

"Britain is going to change as a result. The question is how. The Conservatives want to use Brexit to turn our country into a low wage tax haven. Labour is determined to ensure we can rebuild and transform Britain, so no one and no community is left behind.

"It will be a national failure of historic proportions if the Prime Minister comes back from Brussels without having secured protection for jobs and living standards.

"That's why Labour has set the clear priorities of full access to the European market, rights at work and environmental protection. And we will hold the Government to account every step of the way."