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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."

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

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](#).

Sir Robert Francis' message is clear: the funding crisis in the NHS is putting patient care at risk – Ashworth

Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, responding to Sir Robert Francis' comments on the Andrew Marr Show this morning, said:

"Sir Robert Francis' message is clear: the funding crisis in the NHS is putting patient care at risk. The NHS should be the safest and best in the world, but Sir Robert's warning is that this cannot be achieved given the scale of the financial crisis now engulfing hospital departments up and down the country.

"The Tories' behaviour to date has been to blame patients and doctors for the pressures facing the NHS. But the truth is that the cause of this crisis lies squarely at the feet of The Prime Minister. Theresa May must immediately agree to bring forward a comprehensive funding package for health and social care in the March Budget so no patients are put a risk of harm or unsafe care."

Police Community Surgeries in the West End

I am pleased that Police Scotland is now running community surgeries in the West End.

The surgeries at Blackness Library start tomorrow – see below :

Community Surgeries to be held 2nd Monday of every month from 1-4pm in the Blackness Library Blackness Avenue, Dundee

Come and discuss issues that
matter to you in your community
with your local police officers.



2017 Dates: 13th Feb, 13th March, 10th April, 8th May, 12th June,
10th July, 14th Aug, 11th Sept, 9th Oct, 13th Nov, 11th Dec.

Have a chat over a cup of tea



Advice, information, provide an opportunity for
members of the public to come along and speak
to police officers in relation to issues that affect
them in their community



There are also surgeries at the Mitchell Street Centre (first Tuesday of each month) – further details available [here](#).

[Beijingers buy less fireworks during Spring Festival](#)

Beijing saw a 30.5 percent fall in fireworks and firecracker sales during

Spring Festival compared to last year, mainly due to pollution concerns, according to municipal authorities Sunday.

It is the sixth consecutive annual decline since 2012, according to the fireworks office of the municipal government. Firework-caused fires and injuries also dropped in the capital.

Spring Festival is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar. This year it fell on Jan. 28, the first day of the Chinese Lunar New Year.

The main celebration period traditionally lasts from the New Year's Eve to the 15th day of the first lunar month, or Lantern Festival.

Since Sunday, Beijing resumed its fireworks ban within the fifth ring road.

Nationwide, 444 cities have banned fireworks and 764 other cities imposed fireworks restrictions.

[Gov't to increase protection of immovable cultural relics](#)

The State Administration of Cultural Heritage plans to step up preservation of immovable cultural relics, amid rapid urbanization.

"Immovable cultural relics should be avoided as much as possible in the choosing of construction sites," according to a circular issued by the administration.

The circular clarified procedures for the removal of immovable cultural relic status, and said that if such cultural relics were destroyed by natural disasters or construction activity, authorities should review and establish whether they still had heritage value.

Authorities should also publish such information and solicit public opinion.

More efforts will be made to protect poorly-preserved immovable cultural relics through government support.

China is home to more than 760,000 registered immovable cultural relics, according a 2011 national archaeological survey.