

# SNP must “mind the gap” on tax

21 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are warning the SNP that they must “mind the gap” with the rest of the UK ahead of today’s key vote on tax rates.

The warning comes as the Scottish Parliament prepares to vote for the first time to set new rates of income tax, following the successful implementation of the new Scotland Act.

The SNP Government – under pressure from the Greens – has decided to reject a plan to lift middle earners out of the higher rate of tax, as proposed elsewhere in the UK.

It will instead freeze the rate – dragging police officers, senior teachers and nurses into paying it.

The Scottish Conservatives will today step up their call for the SNP Government to prioritise economic growth by setting competitive tax rates no higher than the rest of the UK.

**Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:**

“Over the last 18 months, Scotland’s growth rate has been around a third of that for the UK – with the result that employment is now falling in Scotland.

□“The SNP’s plans to set tax rates higher than the rest of the UK will only worsen this growing divide we are seeing, deterring investment and reducing new jobs.

“Our message to the SNP today is clear: it needs to mind the gap. Higher taxes in Scotland means lower growth, which will deliver less cash for government to spend on our vital public services.”

“Derek Mackay’s handling of the business rates crisis has shown that this Scottish Government simply does not understand business and the economy.

“It is must start to listen to job creators who need a Government which goes for growth, not one which punishes aspiration.”

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## Scotland’s exercise blackspots

# revealed

20 Feb 2017



Scotland's most and least active areas have been revealed in an official Holyrood survey.

The report, which will be presented to the Scottish Parliament's health committee tomorrow, will show a huge disparity in how active residents.

As a result, the Scottish Conservatives have urged the SNP to provide the necessary action to make Scotland an active nation.

The study of more than 3000 people highlighted the percentage of non-participants in regular sport or physical activity based on postcode.

Aberdeen proved to be the least active area in Scotland with statistics revealing that 35 per cent of respondents from the Granite City don't participate in regular activity – 23 per cent behind leaders Falkirk.

Kilmarnock also collated worrying results, 25 per cent of its respondents putting their name under the non-participation brackets.

## **Scottish Conservative sport spokesman Brian Whittle said:**

"This report reveals the SNP's inability to promote the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle.

"It's hugely important to participate in regular activity, and it's known to come hand in hand with living a healthy and happy life.

"It's sad that the SNP has failed to make the most of Glasgow's Commonwealth Games' potential to make Scotland a healthy and active nation for years to come.

"There are of course various barriers preventing participation in regular activity – lack of time, money and self-confidence to name but a few.

"The SNP seems to only talk about making so many improvements. Now people are realising it has no idea how to address these issues.

"That's why we urge the SNP to read over the Scottish Conservatives' long-term consultation, a document that we believe will go a long way in tackling the obvious inequality of access across Scotland.

"The Scottish Government claims it wants to shed Scotland's unhealthy image.

"However, the only way to start making Scotland a healthier and more active nation is to start knocking these barriers down."

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Click here to read a copy of the report:

[www.parliament.scot/S5\\_HealthandSportCommittee/Meeting%20Papers/Public\\_Papers\\_21\\_Feb\\_2017.pdf](http://www.parliament.scot/S5_HealthandSportCommittee/Meeting%20Papers/Public_Papers_21_Feb_2017.pdf)

A copy of the Scottish Conservative healthy lifestyle strategy:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Scottish-Conservative-Healthy-Lifestyle-Strategy.pdf>

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## [Mackay to face Holyrood on business rates crisis](#)

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20 Feb 2017



Finance secretary Derek Mackay will face Holyrood for the first time tomorrow on the escalating business rates crisis.

He will be quizzed as part of topical questions as firms up and down the country warn about the devastating impact of the revaluation.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking on the matter.

The Scottish Conservatives last week demanded a statement by Mr Mackay amid accusations ministers have been slow act.

The SNP was warned last year there would be a “severe” impact on various industries if business rates changes go ahead.

However, it has taken until this week for Mr Mackay to respond formally in front of MSPs.

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

“Businesses across Scotland want to hear what the Scottish Government is going to do about all this.

“Now we will have that chance in the Scottish Parliament.

“Firms that face going to the wall and people whose jobs are in jeopardy will

be extremely interested in the answer.

“This is fast-becoming a crisis, affecting organisations large and small, and in all areas of the country.

“The SNP needs to take urgent action.”

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**Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the following question in Holyrood tomorrow:**

“To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reported concerns from businesses regarding the non-domestic rates revaluation.”

**The Scottish Conservatives demanded a statement last week:**

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/demand-for-urgent-holyrood-statement-on-business-rates/>

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## [Greater focus needed on supporting the “switched on” generation](#)

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20 Feb 2017



Speaking at a major social media conference today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson called for a greater focus on supporting the “switched on” generation.

She pointed to recent figures which show a marked increase in incidence of depression among young people, especially teenage girls.

Researchers have pinned much of the rise on the hostility of the new social media environment being faced by young people.

Today’s conference was organised by Twitter and Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs, who is campaigning for the NHS to give more support for mental health issues.

**Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

“Social media is a great communications tool which has brought us closer together. But we must also face up to the negative side it has brought too.

“The switched on world is piling huge pressures on young women, and men, to live up to unreachable expectations.

“Young people are being made to feel constantly judged, often harshly. We know that the rise of online bullying has become a major factor in the decline in mental health among young people.

“We need to see government providing people with the education they need on how to tackle this new world and stay psychologically healthy at the same time.

“That includes far greater access to mental health professional in GPs and hospitals. It also means providing more counselling in secondary schools, so that mental health problems can be picked up early.

“The platforms have a duty of care to their members. They must recognise that free speech for some can carry a cost to others.

“Transparent rules for engagement and clear penalties – including having accounts suspended – must be outlined so everyone knows where they stand.

“And sites could provide free notifications or sponsored posts for those organisations and charities offering support – be it the Samaritans, SamH or Breathing Space.

“Reminding people that there is help available can absolutely be part of a forum’s corporate social responsibility.

“Most of all though, we need to take responsibility for our own actions. We have to own what we tweet.

“Debate and disagreement can be good, but it should never cross the line.”

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## [Protecting Scotland’s environment](#)

20 Feb 2017



Our natural resources cannot be consumed at the current “unsustainable” rate, the Scottish Conservatives will declare this week, in a major new policy paper marking Scottish Environment Week.

In the document, to be published on Wednesday, the party will spell out a series of new initiatives designed to protect Scotland’s environment and

tackle climate change.

The document comes with the Scottish Conservatives preparing for its spring conference on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, where it will set out its plan to offer a fresh alternative to the SNP as Scotland's main opposition party.

In the foreword, published today, the party's environment spokesman Maurice Golden makes it clear that "we can no longer consume our natural resources at the current unsustainable rate, and we can no longer think of economic development as a competing force against environmental protection".

Scottish Environment week is organised by Scottish Environment Link, and will feature a series of events designed to highlight efforts to tackle climate change. Among policies outlined in the new paper, the party will say:

- 10% of all the Scottish Government's capital budget should be spent on energy efficiency measures – with the aim of ensuring all homes are energy efficiency by 2030.
- A new target should be set to ensure 75% of all waste is recycled by 2035 through the creation of an easy-to-use collection system.
- Ministers should create 15,000 hectares of new quality woodland per year – up from 7,600 a year in 2015.

**Writing in the foreword to the document, Mr Golden will say:**

"The Scottish Conservative approach to the Environment and Climate Change is founded on three key tenets.

"The first is a belief that Climate Change is one of the greatest challenges we face, and we must show leadership on the world stage to reduce global emissions.

"The second is that, in the long term, resource prices will increase, and moreover, access to these resources will become less reliable. By decreasing our reliance on products which are manufactured abroad we can reduce global emissions but also grow the economy and create jobs here in Scotland.

"The third tenet is that we need to look holistically at our management of the environment. That means making the business case, but also recognising that for certain projects the business case will not be viable if assessed via conventional accounting.

"We will prioritise achieving behaviour change, technological advancement, big data and innovation in order to tackle climate change, boost biodiversity, grow the economy, create more, better jobs and ensure new ideas are delivered for the benefit of Scotland."

The full paper will be launched in Edinburgh on Wednesday by party leader Ruth Davidson and Mr Golden.

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More details on Scottish Environment week here:

<http://www.scotlink.org/events/upcoming-events/scottish-environment-week/>