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- Hard-pressed businesses urged to appeal unfair rates rise

15 Feb 2017



Businesses facing massive rates rises in Scotland have been urged to lodge appeals following a controversial revaluation.

The Scottish Conservatives said any business which feels it can't afford the increase should make those views known to ministers by formally objecting.

The more firms which do so, shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said, the more likely it would be for the SNP to have a change of heart.

Businesses right across the country have warned they will go to the wall if the rates hike is applied, with some facing increases of more than double.

They say the system for revaluation is flawed and needs to be reviewed.

It comes as new figures revealed Scotland continues to lag behind the rest of the UK when it comes to employment, with the jobless number rising by 6000 in the last quarter.

And that will only get worse, the party said, if more businesses are forced to close as a result of the punitive changes.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Businesses facing these extortionate increases could send a very clear message to the SNP on this.

“By formally appealing these increases, finance secretary Derek Mackay would soon realise just how severe a problem this is.

“He’s refusing to listen to opposition parties and experts, but he might listen to the individuals affected.

“Latest employment figures again show Scotland is trailing behind the rest of the UK, and this is becoming a stubborn and worrying trend.

“If the Scottish Government doesn’t heed warnings about firms going out of business as a result of these rises, the unemployment queues are only going to get longer north of the border.

“Derek Mackay seemed able to find tens of millions squirreled away for budget negotiations, so perhaps he could find some extra cash for hard-up businesses too.”

Notes to editors:

For more information on how businesses can appeal, visit:

<https://www.mygov.scot/business-rates-appeals/>

Today, it emerged Scotland continues to lag behind the rest of the UK on employment:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-business-38979937>

[Transport police involved in thousands of arrests each year](#)

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- Transport police involved in thousands of arrests each year

15 Feb 2017



The British Transport Police makes thousands of arrests every year, including hundreds for assault on staff and alcohol-related offences, new figures have shown.

A Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives revealed more than 13,000 arrests have been made since 2011 on trains and at stations in Scotland.

It comes as the SNP attempts to incorporate the BTP into Police Scotland, despite warnings from rail bosses this week that officers dealing with transport incidents could end up getting called away on other duties.

Now the Scottish Conservatives have questioned whether the single force is ready to deal with the dozens of additional incidents which occur on trains every week north of the border.

The FoI statistics showed the BTP made 2023 arrests last year, as well as 110 arrests in the first few weeks of 2017 alone.

Of the incidents in 2016, 221 related to alcohol, while 197 arrests followed allegations of verbal or physical assaults on a staff member.

In total, since 2011, there have been more than 1000 assaults on workers.

Last week, Scotrail said it feared a loss of expertise from the proposals, while officers themselves have pointed to a number of potential pitfalls that could occur as a result of the move.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly questioned why ministers want to take one of the UK's most successful policing departments and merge it with one of the poorest-performing.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

"The sheer numbers involved here show that taking away a dedicated service like the British Transport Police is a bad idea.

"What's more, these are serious cases involving physical assault on staff and the abuse of alcohol.

"Passengers and staff alike respect the BTP and the job they do.

"Many suspect the motivation behind this move is for the SNP to get rid of the word 'British' from Scotland's railways, and replace it with the word 'Scotland'.

"If this move jeopardises the safety of workers and passengers, as these statistics suggest it might, then it must be resisted."

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

"The move by the SNP to have Police Scotland take over the BTP's work is misguided and unpopular.

"It will cause all kinds of confusion, not least when it comes to cross-border services.

"The BTP itself has set out perfectly reasonable alternatives, but the Scottish Government doesn't want to listen.

"If this move results in trains being less safe for staff and passengers, it will be another mark against Police Scotland's name in the eyes of the public."

Notes to editors:

To see a copy of the FoI response, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FoI-Response-0080-17.pdf>

To read more on Scotrail's concerns, visit:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scotrail-warns-transport-police-merger-plan-could-lead-to-delays-1-4362864>

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- Teaching fund a step in right direction, but more needed

14 Feb 2017



The announcement of a new teacher-training fund is a step in the right direction, the Scottish Conservatives have said, but more needs to be done.

The Scottish Government's investment for new teachers has been welcomed by shadow education secretary Liz Smith, but she warned it would not make up for a decade of educational neglect.

Just one of the many issues local authorities have faced under SNP leadership is the recruitment process for schools and maintaining the services of specialist teachers.

Figures have shown that schools have struggled over the years to attract the necessary number of teachers, with some councils even being forced to offer financial incentives.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"This will be welcome news for Scotland's teaching profession which has had to bear the full brunt of the SNP's successive cuts to teacher numbers since 2007.

"It has been abundantly clear for some time that Scotland has too few professionally trained teachers particularly in some core subject areas and we know that several local authorities have found it impossible to fill key vacancies with the obvious costs to education in the classroom.

"The key test is not only the provision of more teacher training places but an improvement in the employment rates for newly qualified teachers.

"Scotland cannot afford to lose its talented pool of teacher trainees nor can it allow the SNP to fail again in its workforce planning."

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14 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have demanded finance secretary Derek Mackay addresses Holyrood over the country's business rates crisis.

Increasing numbers of organisations are protesting at the revaluation scheme, which has seen some pay more than double their current taxation.

Now the SNP has been urged to take action and explain what it intends to do to solve the problem.

Two newspapers are campaigning on behalf of businesses, many of whom say they face closure as a result of the hikes.

A formal request has gone into Scottish Parliament authorities from the Scottish Conservatives for Mr Mackay to give a statement when MSPs return next week.

When challenged on the issue previously, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon merely said there would be an opportunity to appeal for individual businesses.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"This revaluation could see businesses across the country going under, it's as simple as that.

"If that's not cause for the SNP government to act, I don't know what is.

"While Nicola Sturgeon obsesses with Brexit and independence, Scottish companies large and small are staring down the barrel of a gun.

"This revaluation is threatening jobs and the wider economy, and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency."

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“This is fast becoming a crisis for businesses the length and breadth of the country.

“Many say they face closure, while others are being forced to hike their prices to cover these increased costs.

“This is not an acceptable state of affairs, and we need to know what Scotland’s finance secretary intends to do about this.

“It’s time for the SNP to prove it’s not an anti-business government and take some meaningful action to help these businesses which are the lifeblood of our economy.”

The Scottish Conservatives have raised the issue of business rates on a number of occasions since the revaluation:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/ruth-calls-for-immediate-review-of-revaluation-of-business-rates/>

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/09/leading-businesses-appeal-to-snp-over-unfair-rates-hike/>

The Herald launched a campaign today on the issue:

http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/15089947.Can_t_pay_won_t_pay_Licensed_trade_to_fight_new_Poll_Tax_following_closure_fears/

[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.”