

Ruth calls for immediate review of revaluation of business rates

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- Ruth calls for immediate review of revaluation of business rates

12 Feb 2017



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](#).

Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

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- Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

11 Feb 2017



Around one in six Police Scotland buildings are not in daily use, while the Scottish Government is sitting on £1 million worth of empty courtrooms.

Information obtained by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that, of 412 police properties across Scotland, 60 are “not currently in day-to-day use”.

And the research also revealed that sheriff courts which have shut, but not sold, total an estimated value of around £1.13 million.

The Scottish Conservatives have said it shows a lack of forward-planning by the SNP, which is prepared to oversee the closure of courts and police buildings without thinking about what to do with the buildings thereafter.

Police Scotland embarked on a programme of front counter closures in 2014, and outlined plans for even more to shut last year.

The Scottish Conservatives criticised that move, saying people still valued local police stations and they played an important role in cutting crime.

In its response to the party’s Freedom of Information request, Police Scotland said: “Out of 412 properties, 60 are not currently in day-to-day use. A number of those are still used occasionally and some are subject to ongoing engagement with stakeholders regarding future use.”

A number of court closures have also occurred on the SNP’s watch, with 17 sheriff and justice of the peace facilities closing since the decision was announced in 2013.

However, it has now emerged many of these buildings are still on the taxpayer's books, including Arbroath, valued at £240,000; Cupar, valued at £200,000; and Stonehaven, valued at £330,000.

The Scottish Conservatives also criticised the court closures programmes, warning it would make life harder for victims and witnesses, and add an additional burden to those courts remaining.

Scottish Conservative MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of Holyrood's justice committee, said:

"We were critical of SNP plans to close police stations and court buildings from the outset.

"But what this shows is that those proposals went on regardless, without any thought as to what to do with the buildings.

"It means the public has far reduced access to justice, yet the taxpayer hasn't benefited as a result.

"In the face of the absolute refusal to change its mind on these closures, at the very least the money raised from their sale, now the Scottish Government has deemed them surplus to requirements, could go some way to improving justice in Scotland.

"It's yet another example of the SNP making sweeping decisions without even trying to think the whole process through."

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from the Scottish Courts Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Scottish-Courts-FOI-response.pdf>

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from Police Scotland, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Police-FOI-response.pdf>

The Scottish Government's programme of police station closures has been roundly criticised:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-37850332>

Similarly, the nationalists have been under fire for closing a fifth of Scotland's courts:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/09/sheriff-courts-less-efficient-in-wake-of-snp-closure-programme/>

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- SNP arrogance on drug-driving putting many at risk

10 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are urging the SNP to start tackling the issue of drug-driving in Scotland after falling behind the rest of the UK on this issue.

At a Road Safety Scotland conference, it was announced that since English drug-driving laws came into effect two years ago there had been a four-fold increase in the number of drivers being charged with drug-driving.

Despite the evidence clearly highlighting that the introduction of the legislation saw improvements down south, when asked in yesterday's First Ministers Questions, the SNP continued to swerve questions on why similar provisions are yet to be introduced in Scotland.

The SNP's continued dismissal suggests that it is reluctant to utilise English law, which is impeding Scotland's ability to deal with this serious issue.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

"It's wrong that Scotland is so far behind the curve, compared with the rest of the United Kingdom, on this important issue

"The SNP knows that as a result of the changes in England and Wales, the number of motorists charged with drug driving rose significantly and convictions have improved.

"Those driving under the influence of drugs should not be anywhere near the wheel – they not only put their own safety at risk, but others too.

"The SNP's sheer stubbornness is preventing Scotland from finding a way to deal with drug-driving in the best possible way. "The evidence already exists that changes in England and Wales have had the desired effect and the SNP must act on this now."

Scottish legal news article that clarifies the success of the English success of drug-driving laws and Scottish Government plans:

Scotland 'playing catch-up' on education under the SNP

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9 Feb 2017



Scotland is “playing catch” up when it “used to lead the world” on education, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Pointing to a damning report by education experts the Sutton Trust, leader Ruth Davidson said the blame lay entirely at the door of an SNP government which has been in charge for 10 years.

The issue dominated First Minister’s Questions today, but Nicola Sturgeon was unable to offer any explanation for the dreadful findings.

In addition, new analysis has illustrated just how badly Scottish pupils are lagging their contemporaries around the world.

Using PISA statistics released at the end of last year, the Scottish Conservatives found 15-year-old Scottish pupils are:

- **Two years behind Singapore on science**
- **One year behind Ireland and Canada on reading**
- **One year behind Estonia and the Czech Republic on maths**

It backs up conclusions in the Sutton Trust report which states: “There is no specific area where able children in Scotland really excel.”

It also found there had been “a pronounced and sustained decline in able pupils’ performance in science, equivalent to around a year of schooling” north of the border.

Today, Ruth also challenged the First Minister on why a scheme to twin flagship schools with underperforming ones had been dropped by the Scottish Government.

And she urged the SNP to do more than simply launch poster campaigns when it came to attracting more people to the teaching profession.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Scotland used to lead the world in education, but under a decade of SNP government we are now playing catch-up.

“Pupils are not only falling behind their contemporaries south of the border, but are struggling in comparison with countries right across the world.

“That’s the legacy of this SNP government’s 10 years in power.

“It is in sole charge of education and has no-one else to blame.

“The Sutton Trust made a range of recommendations, but Nicola Sturgeon seems unwilling to commit to any of them.

“This inaction is harming the prospects of our children and, considering the First Minister wants to be judged on education, it’s clear much more needs to be done.”

For more information on the Sutton Trust report, visit:

<http://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/three-year-attainment-gap-between-poor-pupils-and-their-better-off-classmates-separates-britains-brightest-teenage-girls/>

For the methodology on the comparative PISA findings, contact the Scottish Conservative press office.

SNP slammed for “unnecessary” tax grab

8 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have attacked the SNP Government today after it emerged that it will impose the highest taxes in the UK on people – despite having had £185m to spare in its kitty.

The extra cash was only revealed last week when the SNP used it to buy off the Scottish Greens.

□The £125m underspend, plus £60m in the business rates pool is far more than the £108m the Scottish Government says it will collect by setting higher thresholds on income tax than the rest of the UK.

That decision is now set to cost jobs and stymie growth, amid warnings from business leaders that it will put off investors and firms from committing to

Scotland.

Finance spokesman Murdo Fraser said:

“Throughout this entire budget process, Derek Mackay has tried to hide the facts from taxpayers in Scotland. Now we know why.

“It turns out Mr Mackay had more than enough money to pay for his budget and pass on a tax break to working families. Yet he opted instead to keep the cash in his back pocket in order to buy off the Greens.

“The SNP could easily have turned to us for support in giving taxpayers a break. But Nicola Sturgeon is a First Minister who would rather stitch up a deal with her independence supporters in the Green party than give taxpayers a break.

“We are about to become the highest taxed part of the UK. Now we know: it is not just bad government, and bad policy – but it is utterly unnecessary as well.”