

[Andrew Gwynne response to new rules new rules from the DFT covering access to taxis for disabled people](#)

Andrew

Gwynne, Labour's shadow minister without portfolio, commenting on new rules from the DFT covering access to taxis for disabled people, said:

"It is welcoming to see the Government taking a positive step to help to prevent some of the discrimination faced by wheelchair users, finally bringing into force this aspect of the Equality Act of 2010.

"This new rule matches those already in place to prevent discrimination against users of assistance dogs, but still in the last year YouGov research showed that 42% of assistance dog owners reported being turned away by a taxi or minicab

"Labour's Disability Equality Roadshow is touring the country, listening to disabled people, many of whom have raised discrimination as an issue.

"Unfortunately the Private Members Bill I introduced earlier this year to fix this problem was talked out by the Government, but I trust the Accessibility action plan will take on the recommendations suggested within my Bill."

[John McDonnell responds to the IFS Green Budget](#)

John

McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, responding to the publication of the IFS Green

Budget today, which reveals that the Tories are going ahead with £34bn in additional austerity at a time when the NHS is in crisis following the slowest

growth in health spending since the 1950s, said:

"This report from the IFS is damning of the seven wasted years of Tory economic failure. Rather than learning the lessons of his predecessor, Philip Hammond is pursuing an austerity agenda that will make matters in our NHS and social care system even worse.

"The Chancellor who has been at the heart of government since 2010 must take his share of responsibility, especially as the IFS is now cutting growth forecasts with the national debt at its highest as a fraction of national income since England won the World Cup, and with the tax burden at its highest in thirty years.

"The fact the NHS is seeing its slowest growth in funding since the 1950s proves you cannot trust the Tories with our health service. And the social care crisis is only set to get even worse as the Tories refuse to provide the funding needed, continuing to let elderly people in our communities down.

"Rather than going ahead with £34 billion of austerity while our public services are already stretched, which as the IFS say have under the Tories seen the longest fall in funding on record, it is time for the Chancellor to truly change direction.

"Labour would call for a serious boost to investment, underpinned by our Fiscal Credibility Rule, which would help bring an end to a Tory economy rigged against working people; sort out the public finances; and get the national debt under control."

The measures announced so far in Theresa May's long-promised housing white paper are feeble beyond belief – Healey

Commenting on further detail on the content of the government's white paper on housing, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Housing John Healey MP

said:

“The measures announced so far in Theresa May’s long-promised housing white paper are feeble beyond belief.

“After seven years of failure and a thousand housing announcements, the housing crisis is getting worse not better.

“There are 200,000 fewer home-owners, homelessness has doubled, and affordable house-building has slumped to a 24 year low

“Ministers should be setting out clear plans to deal with these problems, but all Theresa May’s Ministers have delivered so far is hot air.

“The government should instead back Labour’s plan to fix the housing crisis – thousands more affordable homes to rent and buy, a charter of renters’ rights and action to end to rough sleeping homelessness.”

ENDS

- The government’s announcements on housing to date:
https://www.gov.uk/government/announcements?keywords=&announcement_filter_option=all&topics%5B%5D=housing&departments%5B%5D=all&world_locations%5B%5D=all&from_date=06%2F05%2F2010&to_date=
- The government’s record:
 - The number of households who own their own home has fallen by 200,000, with the number of under-35 households owning a home down by 344,000.
 - There are over 900,000 more households renting from a private landlord than in 2010 including one in four families with dependent children, but rents have risen faster than incomes.
 - Despite 13 separate cuts to housing benefit, including the bedroom tax, the housing benefit bill is £4bn higher each year in cash terms.
 - There are 143,000 fewer council homes than in 2010, with only one home in every six sold under the right to buy replaced, despite promises of ‘one for one’ replacement. Measures in the recent housing and planning act are set to mean the loss of 23,503 council houses a year according to the housing charity Shelter.
 - According to the Government-commissioned Local Plan Expert Group it is now taking councils almost a year (306 days) longer to adopt vital local plans for housing than in 2009. Among the main reasons are: “a lack of political will and commitment”, “a lack of clarity on key issues”, “too many changes... of policy”, and “a lack of guidance, support and resources”. We’ve had constant chop and change but no improvement, despite six piece of planning legislation in six years under the Tories.

Brexit - like independence – is bad for Scotland’s economy

By Kezia Dugdale

The Brexit process is a shambles. First Theresa May said there shouldn't be a vote in Parliament, then her hand was forced. Next she said she wouldn't be publishing a White Paper on her plans for leaving the European Union, but again she was forced into a u-turn.

With each passing day it becomes clearer that this isn't a government in control but an administration being dragged further to the extremes in order to win over support on the Tory backbenches.

As opposed as I am to leaving the EU, I accept that the referendum result didn't go my way. This was a UK-wide vote and the UK voted to leave. We have to accept that we are leaving the European Union. The battle must now turn to how we get the best deal for the country.

That's why today in the Scottish Parliament Labour will vote against the government's current plans to trigger article 50 and begin the process of withdrawal. Brexit is happening, but it doesn't have to be the right-wing version that Theresa May is advocating.

The Tories are threatening to inflict economic vandalism on our country and we must fight that.

But the only thing more damaging for our economy than a Tory Brexit is the SNP's reckless plan for independence.

Labour will not support another independence referendum under any circumstances.

This isn't a knee-jerk reaction. It's based on standing up for the working people the Labour Party was founded to represent.

Brexit will be terrible for Scotland, but independence would be an outright disaster. Our public finances are already struggling. The SNP's budget will impose nearly £170million of cuts on local services like schools and care of the elderly. But leaving the UK would turbo charge that austerity, meaning £15 billion in cuts over and above those already happening today.

That would put the life chances of the next generation of Scots at risk, and have severe consequences for our health service, the payment of pensions and defence in a separate Scotland. Being part of the UK means all of these things are protected. Remaining in Britain secures jobs, helps our economy and bolsters our public finances.

But just as important as the impact of actually leaving the UK, another independence referendum would be deeply divisive.

We all remember what happened the last time – family rows, difficult relationships at work, and communities ripped apart. Scotland is divided enough already, whether along constitutional lines or between the richest and the rest. We can't afford any more division, but that is exactly what another independence referendum would bring.

The majority of people in Scotland voted for working together, in both the EU and Scottish referendums. People know that together we're stronger – as a nation and as communities across the country.

So instead of trying to use Brexit as an excuse to force another independence referendum on the people of Scotland, the Nationalists should stick to the day job.

This article first appeared in the Daily Record on 07/02/2017

Skills Minister outlines plans for aligning Apprenticeships to the needs of the Welsh Economy

That is the message from Skills and Science Minister, Julie James, as she launches the Welsh Government's new Apprenticeship policy today (7 February).

Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy sets out the Welsh Government's vision for addressing the needs of Welsh businesses and the wider economy and has been designed to increase skills levels in priority areas, including where shortages have been reported.

Developed in consultation with businesses, the policy and its five year action plan sets out how the Welsh Government will support the delivery of its manifesto and Taking Wales Forward commitment to create a minimum of 100,000 high quality apprentices in Wales over this Assembly term by focussing on four priority areas:

- Increasing the number of apprentices aged 16-19 by increasing the take-up of quality apprenticeships amongst school leavers.
- Addressing skills shortages by developing apprenticeships particularly in growth and emerging sectors such as the ICT, Engineering, Construction and Financial and Professional Services.
- Developing higher level skills by focussing on apprenticeships at level 4 and above where returns tend to be higher.
- Developing skills pathways by integrating apprenticeships into the wider

education system and making it easier for someone to enter into an apprenticeship from another learning route.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James said:

“This policy highlights our intention to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, which will require higher levels of competence than in the past.

“It also contains a stronger focus on both technical and professional skills needed for high quality employment opportunities within our communities. This will send a strong message about the value of apprenticeships and technical education in supporting people into sustainable employment and self-employment.”

The policy and supporting information also outlines how the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy – a UK Government employment tax due to come into effect on 6 April 2017 – will be managed in Wales.

The Minister added:

“We have said all along that this levy directly conflicts with areas of devolved responsibility, completely overlooks and undermines our very distinctive approach to supporting apprenticeships in Wales and its introduction means that no new significant money is coming to Wales.”

“To help minimise the impact of the levy in Wales the Welsh Government is taking a different approach to its counterparts in England, one which is better aligned to and supports the growing needs of Wales, its people and economy.”

Support for businesses to recruit new apprentices is already available in Wales and will continue to be available to both levy and non-levy paying employers provided the funding supports apprentices in the identified priority areas.

To deliver these priorities the Welsh Government will be increasing its investment in apprenticeships from £96m to £111.5m for 2017-18. This brings our total investment in apprenticeships and traineeships next year to over £126m.

Of the additional funding, £15.5m will be invested this year to ensure that both public and private sector employers are not disadvantaged as a result of the Apprenticeship Levy.

Julie James added:

“Our public services are essential to maintain functions related to education, fire services, waste management, social services and healthcare. We are committed to working with public sector organisations to help them achieve greater consistency and meet future challenges. This will include the publication of specific apprenticeship plans for Local Authorities, the NHS and the ‘blue light’ services.”

The announcement is being made during the Welsh Government’s Jobs Week.

The policy: Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy, its five year [action plan and additional supporting information](#) (external link) is available on the Welsh Government website.