

“Under the Tories living standards are being squeezed and public services are being cut”

The Chancellor's Budget will impose further cuts on the public services we all value.

Philip Hammond claimed it was an upbeat Budget, but the reality is that by the end of this decade up to £1 billion will have been cut from the Scottish Parliament's funding. That means less money to spend on schools and hospitals.

Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale said:

“This was billed as a Budget that would be upbeat, but what we got instead was an insight into the devastating impact a chaotic Tory Brexit will have on families across the UK. Under the Tories living standards are being squeezed, debt is on the rise and public services are being cut.

“The Chancellor could have brought an end to seven years of damaging Tory austerity, but instead he doubled down by imposing cuts to public services and welfare. Despite the £350 million extra for the Scottish Government announced today, the reality is that by the end of this decade up to £1 billion will have been cut from Holyrood's budget – cuts the SNP chooses to meekly pass on to families here in Scotland.

“The fact that the Chancellor barely mentioned Brexit at all is a sign of the Tories' complacency. Brexit will not only damage our economy but it has also provided the Nationalists with the excuse they have been looking for to impose another destabilising independence referendum on the people of Scotland. The Tories cannot be trusted on the Union.”

With major new tax and welfare powers being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, there is a chance to do things differently. For example, Labour has set out a plan to top up Child Benefit by £240 a year by 2020. This will lift 30,000 people out of poverty.

Kezia Dugdale added:

“We don't have to pass on Tory austerity. The SNP should stop using the Scottish Parliament as a conveyor belt for Tory austerity and back Labour's plan to stop the cuts and invest in valued local services like schools and social care.”

One of the big mistakes of the Budget was the Chancellor's change to National Insurance. It means that self-employed workers – like tax drivers and plumbers – will face a National Insurance contributions hike. This breaks a Tory manifesto promise from 2015, where they said that National Insurance would not increase.

Commenting on the National Insurance increase, Scottish Labour Westminster spokesman Ian Murray said:

"This is yet another broken manifesto promise from the Tories. At the General Election in 2015 the Tories made a very clear commitment not to increase National Insurance, yet today the Chancellor did exactly that."

"This Budget proves once and for all that ordinary working people just cannot trust the Tories. The Tories are increasing taxes on those who set up their own businesses and drive our economy while cutting taxes for big business."

Press release: Change of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Montenegro

2015 – present FC0, Temporary duties in the Middle East & North Africa, Finance and Prosperity Directorates 2013 – 2015 Sana'a, Deputy Head of Mission 2013 Full time language training (Arabic) 2010 – 2012 FC0, Head of Policy Unit, National Security, Middle East, North Africa & South Asia 2008 – 2010 FC0, Deputy Director Estates & Sustainability, Estates and Security Department 2007 Kurdistan Region & Northern Iraq, Consul General 2006 – 2007 Liberia, Political Chargé 2004 – 2005 FC0, Near East Team Leader, Arab, Israel North Africa Group 2002 – 2004 FC0, Head of Political Team, Afghanistan Unit 1999 – 2002 Colombo, Second Secretary Political 1997 – 1998 FC0, Desk Officer Greece and Cyprus 1997 Joined FC0

The Government must deliver the broadband infrastructure that UK homes and businesses need – Tom Watson

Tom Watson, Labour's Shadow

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, commenting on the announcement of an agreement for Openreach to legally separate from BT, said:

"This is a welcome announcement that must now deliver for customers, far too many of whom don't have access to broadband or put up with a poor quality service."

"The Government's failure to create healthy competition in the UK's digital market has caused the rollout

of broadband to be far too slow and millions of British households and businesses have paid the price, at a cost of billions of pounds to the economy.

“While the legal separation of Openreach from BT is clearly a good thing for consumers we must also ensure it works for Openreach’s 32,000 employees and the Government must work with CWU to ensure that jobs, pensions and terms and conditions are protected.

“Now the separation has been agreed the Government must waste no time in delivering the broadband infrastructure that UK homes and businesses so badly need.”

Press release: Countryside Stewardship opens for 2017

From today (10 March 2017) farmers and land managers can apply for the Mid Tier and Higher Tier of Countryside Stewardship. This is a targeted scheme which funds projects to:

- restore habitats
- improve water quality and woodland
- reduce flood risk
- protect landscapes
- provide year-round food and shelter for pollinators, birds and other wildlife

Improvements have been made to the application process this year to make it easier to apply, including simplifying evidence requirements for claims and applications wherever possible. Additional support and advice is also available from Natural England.

Countryside Stewardship grants will be offered to those who propose to make the best environmental improvements within their local area.

The Mid Tier of Countryside Stewardship offers 5-year agreements for environmental improvements in the wider countryside, such as reducing diffuse water pollution or improving the environment for birds, pollinators and farm wildlife.

Higher Tier specifically focuses on environmentally important sites, including commons and woodlands, where the more complex management requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission, including tailoring of options.

Application packs can be requested from Natural England by calling 0300 060 3900.

Those thinking of applying for the Higher Tier, including woodland improvement, will need to have submitted an initial application by 5 May 2017. Higher Tier application packs will need to be requested by 13 April so that Natural England can send out the maps and evidence requirements in time for farmers and land managers to develop their application.

Mid Tier applications need to be submitted by 30 September 2017. Mid Tier application packs will need to be requested by 31 July.

Natural England will contact everyone who has a Higher Level Stewardship or Entry Level Stewardship agreement expiring this year to let them know which scheme they will be most suited to and what support is available.

See the main [Countryside Stewardship](#) page for more information, including guidance material.

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