

Reports that the Government is considering a concession on parliamentary engagement and a vote on the negotiations are welcome – Smith

Baroness

(Angela) Smith of Basildon, Labour's Leader in the House of Lords, in response

to reports of potential government concessions on the Article 50 Bill, said:

"Reports

that the Government is considering a serious concession on parliamentary engagement and a vote on the negotiations are welcome.

"What

happens next is a pivotal moment and will determine the tone and trust in the weeks, months and years to come on this issue.

"Ministers

have rightly conceded the need for a vote before the deal is concluded and we welcome that.

"Our

amendment on a vote on the outcome of negotiations has been drafted by taking note of what happened in the Commons, including ministerial comments, as well as expert advice from peers in the Lords debates. The Government will have heard the senior cross bench peer and former Supreme Court judge Lord Hope's speech about the need for further legislation should this Bill not be amended.

"We

believe we would win that vote. The Government of course could try to overturn it in the Commons.

"But

rather than Ministers just holding to the line that they won't amend the bill but will make a statement on the record, it would be a positive and mature signal for future progress of legislation if having accepted the principle they write this into the bill."

Ends

News story: New electricity connection to France gets go-ahead

The new ElecLink electricity connection between Britain and France will provide greater access to the continental electricity market, and help to reduce consumer bills as electricity can be flexibly imported and exported to take advantage of cheaper prices.

The project will run through the Channel Tunnel between Sellindge in the UK and Les Mandarins in France. It will have the capacity to power up to 2 million homes and provide further resilience for Britain's electricity supply.

A combination of domestic electricity generation including new nuclear power, gas and renewables, as well as increased access for importing and exporting electricity supplies from Europe, means homes and businesses will have reliable power at the lowest possible price all year round.

Thanks to the Government's supportive regulatory framework, including allowing interconnectors to participate in the Capacity Market, and innovative solutions from the developer, this major new piece of infrastructure will be financed on a purely commercial basis, with no risk to British tax and bill payers.

UK Energy Minister Jesse Norman said:

As a government we are strongly supportive of greater electricity trading with our European partners in order to lower household bills and deliver energy security as part of our modern industrial strategy.

We've created the right environment for cooperative projects like ElecLink to attract investment and compete in the market without needing financial support from our tax and bill payers.

The ElecLink interconnector is one of the most advanced new interconnection projects across Europe and the first of its kind between Britain and France since 1986, when the existing IFA (Interconnexion France-Angleterre) interconnector was commissioned.

ElecLink has said that the new interconnector will:

- Provide a gigawatt (1000MW) of electricity connection between the UK and France, enough capacity to power up to 2 million homes
- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 6 million tonnes over the period 2020-2030, by enabling electricity demand in Britain and France to be met by the most efficient generating plants
- Create approximately 300 new jobs during the construction phase

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Groupe Eurotunnel Jacques Gounon said:

ElecLink further underlines how important the Channel Tunnel is to Britain and France. Not only is it a vital transport link, it is set to play an instrumental part in the supply of electricity to the UK, France and continental Europe.

With the debate over the future of energy security brought into focus recently, ElecLink delivers a smart, low-cost and environmentally friendly way to secure the electricity supply. We are proud to be inaugurating ElecLink and delighted to mark the official start of this great project which will significantly benefit the economies and consumers in both France and the United Kingdom.

[News story: #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru is live](#)

From:

First published:

23 February 2017

Join the campaign and spread the word about Wales.

The UK Government has launched its #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru campaign.

The #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru is a cross government social media campaign created to promote Wales to the world. As St David's Day approaches, #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru will use the seven days leading up to the national day, and the day itself, as an opportunity to promote and celebrate Wales.

We want you to help us showcase Wales and share your views on what makes the country such a great place to visit, work and do business.

We have award winning beaches and towns, international businesses operating here and a culture and language to be proud of.

Using #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru we would like you to get involved on social media by sharing, images, facts and stories about Wales to show the world what makes Wales great.

Keep up to date on the campaign and what others are saying about #WalesWeek / #WythnosCymru by following @UKGovWales and @LlywDUCymru on [Facebook](#) , [Twitter](#) / [Trydar](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Press release: Changes to Personal Independence Payment regulations

From:

First published:

23 February 2017

Part of:

The government is committed to ensuring the welfare system is a strong safety net for those who need it.

The government spends around £50 billion a year to support people with disabilities and health conditions.

Part of that support comes through Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This was introduced to replace the outdated Disability Living Allowance and helps with the extra costs that can often come with being disabled, such as added transport costs or assistance with cooking.

The PIP assessment is designed to focus more support on those who are likely to have a higher level of need, and higher costs associated with their disability. For example, claimants who require therapy at home, like dialysis or oxygen, are likely to need more support than someone who needs help to take medication. Similarly, people who cannot carry out a journey because of a visual or cognitive impairment are likely to need more support than someone who experiences psychological distress when they undertake a journey, for example as a result of social phobia or anxiety.

Recent legal judgments have interpreted the assessment criteria for PIP in ways that are different to what was originally intended. The government is now making amendments to clarify the criteria, to restore the original aim of the policy and ensure support goes to those most in need.

This is not a policy change and will not result in any claimants seeing a reduction in the amount of PIP previously awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The purpose is to restore the original intention of the benefit which has been expanded by the legal judgments.

Spending on disability benefits has risen by more than £3 billion in real terms since 2010, and will remain higher in each year to 2020, than in 2010.

Failing to reinstate the original intention of the policy would have led to substantial unplanned increases to public expenditure totalling £3.7 billion (between 2016 to 2017 and 2021 to 2022).

Media enquiries for this press release – 0203 267 5125

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[Welsh Government funding helps children get a Flying Start](#)

The funding, which has been awarded for this financial year (2016-17), will support a wide range of projects from the full refurbishments of several Flying Start buildings to replacing kitchen cupboards and broken fencing.

Flying Start supports families living in some of the most disadvantaged communities across Wales. It offers twelve and a half hours of high quality childcare a week for 2-3 year olds; support for the development of children's speech, language and communication; parenting support; and an enhanced health visitor service.

Announcing the funding the Cabinet Secretary said:

“Giving children the best possible start in life is a top priority for the Welsh Government. Flying Start is a key early intervention programme, helping to improve children's life chances and reducing the need for later remedial action. It is a useful tool in tackling adverse childhood experiences which can have a long-lasting impact on young people throughout their lives.

“This is why we provide over £70 million a year in revenue funding to Local Authorities to deliver the scheme and why we have already provided £3m of capital funding this year alone to ensure the children have the best possible facilities. This extra £800,000 will ensure more children have a stimulating and exciting environment in which to play and learn.”