

Mackay to face Holyrood on business rates crisis

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20 Feb 2017



Finance secretary Derek Mackay will face Holyrood for the first time tomorrow on the escalating business rates crisis.

He will be quizzed as part of topical questions as firms up and down the country warn about the devastating impact of the revaluation.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking on the matter.

The Scottish Conservatives last week demanded a statement by Mr Mackay amid accusations ministers have been slow act.

The SNP was warned last year there would be a “severe” impact on various industries if business rates changes go ahead.

However, it has taken until this week for Mr Mackay to respond formally in front of MSPs.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Businesses across Scotland want to hear what the Scottish Government is going to do about all this.

“Now we will have that chance in the Scottish Parliament.

“Firms that face going to the wall and people whose jobs are in jeopardy will be extremely interested in the answer.

“This is fast-becoming a crisis, affecting organisations large and small, and in all areas of the country.

“The SNP needs to take urgent action.”

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the following question in Holyrood tomorrow:

“To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reported concerns from businesses regarding the non-domestic rates

reevaluation.”

The Scottish Conservatives demanded a statement last week:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/demand-for-urgent-holyrood-statement-on-business-rates/>

Greater focus needed on supporting the “switched on” generation

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20 Feb 2017



Speaking at a major social media conference today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson called for a greater focus on supporting the “switched on” generation.

She pointed to recent figures which show a marked increase in incidence of depression among young people, especially teenage girls.

Researchers have pinned much of the rise on the hostility of the new social media environment being faced by young people.

Today’s conference was organised by Twitter and Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs, who is campaigning for the NHS to give more support for mental health issues.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Social media is a great communications tool which has brought us closer together. But we must also face up to the negative side it has brought too.

“The switched on world is piling huge pressures on young women, and men, to live up to unreachable expectations.

“Young people are being made to feel constantly judged, often harshly. We know that the rise of online bullying has become a major factor in the decline in mental health among young people.

“We need to see government providing people with the education they need on how to tackle this new world and stay psychologically healthy at the same time.

“That includes far greater access to mental health professional in GPs and hospitals. It also means providing more counselling in secondary schools, so that mental health problems can be picked up early.

“The platforms have a duty of care to their members. They must recognise that free speech for some can carry a cost to others.

“Transparent rules for engagement and clear penalties – including having accounts suspended – must be outlined so everyone knows where they stand.

“And sites could provide free notifications or sponsored posts for those organisations and charities offering support – be it the Samaritans, SamH or Breathing Space.

“Reminding people that there is help available can absolutely be part of a forum’s corporate social responsibility.

“Most of all though, we need to take responsibility for our own actions. We have to own what we tweet.

“Debate and disagreement can be good, but it should never cross the line.”

Protecting Scotland’s environment

20 Feb 2017



Our natural resources cannot be consumed at the current “unsustainable” rate, the Scottish Conservatives will declare this week, in a major new policy paper marking Scottish Environment Week.

In the document, to be published on Wednesday, the party will spell out a series of new initiatives designed to protect Scotland’s environment and tackle climate change.

The document comes with the Scottish Conservatives preparing for its spring conference on March 3rd, where it will set out its plan to offer a fresh alternative to the SNP as Scotland’s main opposition party.

In the foreword, published today, the party’s environment spokesman Maurice Golden makes it clear that “we can no longer consume our natural resources at the current unsustainable rate, and we can no longer think of economic development as a competing force against environmental protection”.

Scottish Environment week is organised by Scottish Environment Link, and will feature a series of events designed to highlight efforts to tackle climate change. Among policies outlined in the new paper, the party will say:

- 10% of all the Scottish Government's capital budget should be spent on energy efficiency measures – with the aim of ensuring all homes are energy efficiency by 2030.
- A new target should be set to ensure 75% of all waste is recycled by 2035 through the creation of an easy-to-use collection system.
- Ministers should create 15,000 hectares of new quality woodland per year – up from 7,600 a year in 2015.

Writing in the foreword to the document, Mr Golden will say:

"The Scottish Conservative approach to the Environment and Climate Change is founded on three key tenets.

"The first is a belief that Climate Change is one of the greatest challenges we face, and we must show leadership on the world stage to reduce global emissions.

"The second is that, in the long term, resource prices will increase, and moreover, access to these resources will become less reliable. By decreasing our reliance on products which are manufactured abroad we can reduce global emissions but also grow the economy and create jobs here in Scotland.

"The third tenet is that we need to look holistically at our management of the environment. That means making the business case, but also recognising that for certain projects the business case will not be viable if assessed via conventional accounting.

"We will prioritise achieving behaviour change, technological advancement, big data and innovation in order to tackle climate change, boost biodiversity, grow the economy, create more, better jobs and ensure new ideas are delivered for the benefit of Scotland."

The full paper will be launched in Edinburgh on Wednesday by party leader Ruth Davidson and Mr Golden.

More details on Scottish Environment week here:

<http://www.scotlink.org/events/upcoming-events/scottish-environment-week/>

[ScotRail forks out £2k a day in compensation to disgruntled passengers](#)

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18 Feb 2017



Train passengers are handed more than £2000 a day in compensation from Scotrail amid complaints of cancellations and delays.

Figures obtained by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed £587,527 was paid out by bosses between April and December 2016 to commuters.

The majority of these payments were for delayed trains, as transport minister Humza Yousaf faced pressure on the quality and reliability of Scotland's trains.

Of the half-million total, £340,000 was given to those who complained of delay, with £52,000 handed to others as a "gesture of goodwill".

The Freedom of Information request also showed there was £178,000 paid out under various Scotrail "policies", which the organisation describes as full or partial refunds given out to those passengers who feel the agreed level of service wasn't reached.

In total, more than 40,000 people successfully sought compensation in nine months.

The table also shows a radical increase in both passengers affected and the amount of money paid.

In April, there were 1963 people who claimed £24,244 in compensation.

But by December, when the trains crisis began to intensify, that rose to 9224 claiming £94,878.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

"The rising cost of compensation appears to reflect the nosedive in quality and reliability experienced by passengers on Scotland's trains.

"It's no surprise the bill has surpassed £500,000 for the last nine months when you consider the problems on our railways.

"As well as passengers, you have to feel for the staff who are doing their best with no help from the Scottish Government, and they will be wondering how transport minister Humza Yousaf ever allowed it to get this bad.

"And even if this cost isn't coming directly from the public purse, passengers and taxpayers – including those who never even use a railway – will end up paying.

"It's vital the situation on Scotland's railways is sorted out.

"What worries me the most is, as with so many other public services, the Scottish Government has been completely neglectful, focusing on a renewed drive for independence rather than the day job of running the country."

Social media and mental health conference set to take place

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17 Feb 2017



A conference on how social media can help young people access mental health support in Scotland is to take place on Monday.

The event will bring together social media organisations, MSPs, experts and charities to explore how online firms can do more to assist those seeking information on psychological matters.

It has been co-organised by Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs and Twitter, and will be attended by both leader Ruth Davidson and mental health minister Maureen Watt.

The Edinburgh event was organised after Mr Briggs called on social media firms to offer free mental health advertising on their platforms last October.

That sparked contact between the Lothians MSP and Twitter, with the firm saying it will support the best campaign ideas which emerge on the day.

Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs said:

“Last year I called for social media companies to offer free advertising for mental health organisations so more of our young people would know where to access mental health information and support.

“Surveys have shown the vast majority of youngsters don’t know how or where to access such support.

“I am delighted Twitter took up my call and have worked with me to arrange this event.

“It will bring together mental health charities, youth organisations, academics, design experts, MSPs and the Scottish Government.

“It’s brilliant news that Twitter has pledged to support the best campaigns that come out of the day, ensuring they will reach young people across Scotland and potentially inspire other ideas around the UK and beyond.”

DAY – Monday, February 20, 2017

TIME – 10am-4pm

PLACE – The Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh EH1 2NE

All media are invited to attend. Both Miles and Ruth will be available for interview and photographs.

Miles urged social media firms to do more to help youngsters coping with mental health challenges last year:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/10/social-media-firms-should-offer-free-mental-health-adverts/>

For more information on the event visit:

<https://blog.twitter.com/en-gb/2017/how-can-social-media-help-address-mental-health-public-policy-goals>