

North Devon Conservatives

t (Press) 01271 344300

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Milton warns of threat of higher taxes to pay for new tier of politicians

Philip Milton, Prospective Conservative Member of Parliament for North Devon, has learned that Rosie Winterton, the Minister for Regional Economic Coordination, intends to push ahead with John Prescott's idea for an elected regional assembly for the South West. This extra rung of government would have to be funded by a regional levy on council tax which would increase the bills of everyone living in North Devon. Ms Winterton worked closely with John Prescott on plans for regional assemblies and said in a recent keynote speech on local government that she would not let the plan for elected regional bodies "slip off the agenda" and pledged the Government "will come back to it".

Commenting on the plans Philip said:

"In the middle of a recession when my constituents are struggling to keep up with the cost of living it is ridiculous that the Government wants to add another unnecessary and unwanted tax on them. The original plan for regional assemblies was rejected by the public in the 2004 North East referendum and since then I have not detected any desire for them, certainly not in my constituency. Making my constituents pay for a new layer of government that they do not want shows how out of touch Labour Ministers are. Only a Conservative Government will remove regional government and give powers back to local elected councils."

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Notes to Editors

LABOUR PLANS FOR ELECTED REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES BACK ON

Rosie Winterton is the new Minister for Local Government and Minister for Regional Economic Coordination, as well as the Regional Minister for Yorkshire and the Humber. She was John Prescott's Head of Office from 1994 to 1997 and an active campaigner in the 2004 referendum in favour of an elected regional assembly in the North East.

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EX31 1EU. Tel 01271 343101

In a keynote speech to the Local Government Information Unit on 15 July on regional government, she asserted:

“I have always been in favour of regional government. I worked with John Prescott on the Alternative Regional Strategy, which formed the basis of many of the structures we see today. I campaigned hard in the referendum in the North East, and I was disappointed with the outcome”

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/speeches/corporate/doregionsmatter>

Local Government Chronicle magazine reports in more detail:

“Local government minister Rosie Winterton has spoken of her continuing support for elected regional government. Ms Winterton, a campaigner for a ‘yes’ vote in the 2004 referendum on creating an elected regional assembly for the north east, said she **did not want elected regional government to ‘slip off the agenda’**.”

Speaking at a conference about regional government, Ms Winterton said elected regional assemblies were the obvious solution to the democratic deficit caused by giving regional development agencies responsibility for drafting regional strategies. ‘I keep banging on about it because I think **we will come back to it** eventually,’ she said. ‘**The obvious answer** [to the democratic deficit] is to have elections and democracy. That’s my personal view.’

Talking to *LGC* afterwards, Ms Winterton said: ‘I’ve had a long-term, very personal interest in regional government. I was very disappointed we didn’t win that referendum. I campaigned for it and I suspect it will be something people **will return to**.’”

Source: *Local Government Chronicle*, 23 July 2009.

<http://www.lgeplus.com/policy-and-politics/constitutional-reform/winterton-backs-elected-regional-government/5004190.article>

The 2004 North East regional government referendum was overwhelming rejected by 78% to 22%.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_East_referendum#The_result

REGIONAL POLITICIANS WILL MEAN REGIONAL COUNCIL TAX

The Government’s plans for elected regional assemblies have require regional assemblies to impose a levy on council tax, similar to the Greater London Authority.

John Prescott’s Regions White Paper explained: ‘The simplest means for an elected assembly to raise money from people within its region is a **precept on the council tax**. This is the means by which the Greater London Authority can raise additional funds and by which various other public bodies, such as county councils and police authorities, are partly funded. An assembly will set the level of the precept, but the money will be collected by councils in the region as part of the existing arrangements for collecting council tax... **An elected assembly will also be allowed to set a higher precept within the region to fund additional spending** if it considered this desirable.’ (DTLR, *Your Region, Your Choice*, Cm 5511, May 2002, p.45-6).

In 2009-10, as a result of the largesse of Ken Livingstone, the Greater London Authority charges a levy of £310 a year on a Band D bill; of this, excluding police and fire, £30 is attributable to the ‘core’ GLA (GLA, *The Greater London Authority’s Consolidated Budget and Component Budgets for 2009-10*, February 2009, p.39). Boris Johnson has frozen the level of council tax in his first year in office.

http://www.london.gov.uk/gla/budget/current_budget.jsp

John Prescott’s Regions White Paper stated that each regional assembly would have 25-35 elected members (*Your Region, Your Choice*, 2002, p.53). They would be paid, full-time posts (p.57). Across the eight government office regions, this would mean the creation of up to 280 more full-time politicians.

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The White Paper also stated that “a regional assembly will have around 200 members of staff, excluding staff working for the Regional Development Agency” (p.57). This would entail bankrolling at least 1,600 more bureaucrats across the eight regional assemblies - on top of other regional quangos, town halls and central government.

The example of the Greater London Authority under Ken Livingstone shows how the initial Government estimates on the number of staff were hopelessly under-estimated, as the staff soared to over 600 compared to the Government’s original estimate of 250.

UNELECTED REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES STILL HERE

In July 2007, after Gordon Brown took office, Labour Ministers spun that the unelected regional assemblies would be abolished (*BBC News Online*, ‘Regional Assemblies will be axed’, 17 July 2007).
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6903108.stm

Yet the planning and housing powers of the regional assemblies are merely being transferred to the unelected Regional Development Agencies, whilst the unelected regional assemblies are in the process of rebranding themselves as Regional Leaders’ Boards.

“Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in respect of which Government Office regions (a) her Department and (b) the relevant Government Office has been notified that the regional assembly is to be replaced by a Leaders’ Board; and what the name and address of each such board will be. [268882]

John Healey: CLG and the relevant Government Offices have been notified of new governance working arrangements in the North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, South East and North West.

These new bodies, or committees connected to them, will be recognised as the Regional Planning Body as an interim arrangement until commencement of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Bill when Local Authority Leaders’ Boards following consultation by participating authorities on a scheme will be approved by the Secretary of State.

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