Up to 40 billion reasons our public services need us in the EU

After every Chancellor’s Budget there is 24 hours where the government’s spin is relatively unchallenged in the national newspapers. The eye-catching measures become front page splashes and are the immediate topic of discussion on phone-ins. This year’s was the ‘sugar tax’ which caused a short flurry of attention before most other measures can be assessed or trends identified to reveal which groups in society stand to be worse off and who will gain.

These early headlines are often forgotten when the authoritative Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) produces its detailed analysis of the Budget. The IFS can change the political weather and pop the bubble of politicians’ claims for months to come. This year the ‘sugar tax’ was swept away by the conclusive proof that the Budget was transferring wealth from the poorest to the richest and that 370,000 disabled people were set to lose £3,500 each per year on average. When the IFS speak out, people sit up and listen. Their evidence combined with clear cross-party opposition and protests from disability campaigners thankfully led to a government climb-down.

Now we have the verdict from the IFS on the most likely economic consequences of the UK leaving the European Union. Their conclusion is that public finances would be between £20-40 billion worse off by 2020. Not only would this be disastrous for the economy given the current anaemic recovery, but the consequences for schools, hospitals and other public services would be catastrophic given they would be on top of the severe measures already planned by the Conservatives.

We can predict which areas of the country and which groups of people would be hardest hit given the government’s record. The North of England and less affluent areas would be first in the firing line. Those on lower incomes would be hit hardest than the more affluent. Support for the disabled would be revisited and salami-sliced once more. Investment in infrastructure such as flood defences could be cut again or delayed further. Our society and economy would become even more divided.

That is why it is preposterous and misleading in the extreme to see politicians leading the Leave campaign argue that public services would somehow be better off if we left the EU. Many of these individuals have spent their political lives undermining the NHS, gutting councils and eroding social housing. They have no answer to the recent survey of NHS Trust Chief Executives which showed a vast majority fear Brexit would negatively impact on NHS staffing levels which are already dangerously stretched to breaking point.

In the end it’s straightforward. Would you as a user of public services trust Michael Gove, Iain Duncan-Smith, Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson and John Redwood to be truthful about the impact of Brexit on the public services given their past record of attacking them? Alternatively you can believe the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies, the trade unions who represent millions who work in our public services and the people who manage them. For the sake of funding our public services we are better off remaining in the EU.

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