

# Growing rebellion over cuts to disability payments

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George Osborne is facing another damaging rebellion over welfare cuts after Conservative MPs attacked a decision to cut more than £4 billion from disability benefits.

Senior ministers are among those concerned by the plan. Some were already predicting last night that the chancellor would be forced to back down over the measure, which could affect 640,000 people.

Government insiders said that there would have to be a vote on the measure, with rebels believing that there were more than enough concerned Tory

MPs to inflict a defeat on Mr Osborne.

The chancellor was forced to ditch a plan to cut £4.4 billion from tax credits after MPs in his party revolted last year and there were indications yesterday that he was prepared to compromise over the plans. He told the BBC that he was "always happy to listen to proposals about how to improve" his proposals.

Several Conservative MPs publicly criticised the decision to cut the personal independence payments (PIPs) handed to people who need aids, such as grab rails, to help them to deal with their disability. The change to PIPs would save the government £4.4 billion over five years.

Some Conservative MPs said that

they were worried about the size of the cuts. Others said that they had backed separate cuts to disability benefits this month because they believed that many people would still have been able to fall back on the PIP system.

Andrew Percy, the MP for Brigg & Goole, said the squeeze on disability benefits sent the wrong message and a Tory rebellion would be big enough to stop it. "The government has a very small majority so you don't need many for this to be a problem of parliamentary arithmetic," he told *The World At One* on BBC Radio 4. "It is fair to say the numbers on this who have expressed concern are very significant indeed."

Guto Bebb, the Conservative MP for

Aberconwy, said: "It's fair to say that there is a concern that these changes are being driven for purposes other than welfare reform ... There is a lot of work to be done to ensure that the detail is persuasive."

Johnny Mercer, the Conservative MP for Plymouth, Moor View, and the vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, said that he was concerned by [the] proposed changes to PIP.

"We must look after our most vulnerable at every turn," he tweeted. "No doubt welfare spend still too high, but for those who really need it, it is a lifeline."

There is also frustration inside gov-

ernment at what was described as Mr Osborne's "cack-handed" handling of the issue. One minister said that it was a "political decision not based on a true sense of how real lives will be affected. Put your money on a U-turn."

Iain Duncan Smith, the work and pensions secretary, sent a letter to Conservative MPs yesterday attempting to spell out why the changes were needed. "The number of people who qualify for PIP solely due to aids and appliances ... has tripled in 18 months," he wrote.

"Yet in 96 per cent of these cases reviewed by health professionals, they found that the likely ongoing extra costs of daily living due to their disability was low or even zero."

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