

# EasyJet boss threatens to bail out of UK

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THE airline run by one of David Cameron's business advisers threatened yesterday to move its headquarters out of Britain.

EasyJet, which employs around 1,000 at its Luton base, has started talks about transferring to another European Union country.

Chief executive Dame Carolyn McCall, a member of the Prime Minister's business advisory group who backed the Remain campaign, is said to have signalled in private meetings that moving is almost inevitable.

Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, a member of the Treasury Select Committee who campaigned to leave the EU, said: 'This is more a political statement by easyJet than anything else.'

'They backed Remain in the campaign. Their customers voted to leave and now they are going against their customers. I think it is unwise.'

'The sensible thing to do is see what happens. We haven't even begun negotiations. Making multi-million-pound decisions at this stage is not in the interest of shareholders.'

Under EU rules, airlines are able to fly freely across Europe, but there are now questions over whether that will continue to apply to UK-based

operators after Brexit.

EasyJet is lobbying the British and EU governments to retain the status quo in the aviation market, but it has also drawn up contingency plans to set up a new company in Europe or move its legal base from Luton to a city in the EU.

The company has already held preliminary talks with a handful of EU member states about issuing it with an air operator's certificate (AOC) that would allow it to base its HQ in them.

EasyJet insisted that no jobs would be lost at Luton. It is

## 'This is a political statement'

thought the company may relocate just a handful of staff depending on the regime operated by the aviation regulator in the country it moves to.

The company said: 'EasyJet is lobbying the UK government and the EU to ensure the continuation of a fully liberal and deregulated aviation market within the UK and Europe.'

'As part of EasyJet's contingency planning before the referendum, we had informal discussions with a number of European aviation regulators about the

establishment of an AOC in a European country. EasyJet has now started a formal process to acquire an AOC. Until the outcome of the UK/EU negotiations is clearer, EasyJet does not need to make any other structural or operational changes. We have no plans to move from Luton – our home for 20 years.'

John Longworth, the former director-general of the British Chambers of Commerce who was ousted after backing Brexit, said: 'Big corporations only prosper with the consent of the society in which they operate.'

'I don't think people will react too well to corporations that desert the country. Corporations have to make big decisions through necessity but to do it out of choice, I don't think people will react very well to it. It is a very dangerous thing.'

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**EasyJet chief: Dame Carolyn McCall is said to think leaving Britain is inevitable**

