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- Ambulances forced to attend thousands of drink-related emergencies

2 Apr 2018



Ambulance crews were forced to attend more than 15,000 emergencies last year where alcohol was to blame, it has emerged.

Figures obtained by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed the number of incidents where drink was an “additional factor” increased from 2016.

In total, there have been 53,141 alcohol-related incidents in the past three years, the equivalent of nearly 50 a day.

The Freedom of Information response showed Glasgow had the highest number of instances in 2017, with a total of 3783.

That was followed by Edinburgh with 1674 and North Lanarkshire with 1279.

And the true number is likely to be even higher, as paramedics often don't specifically record if alcohol was one of the causes of the emergency.

The figures come as the Scottish Ambulance Service struggles to deal with the scale of demand across Scotland.

It was reported earlier this year that police and fire services have been called upon to help out with certain patients.

The Scottish Conservatives previously campaigned for some measures such as recovery centres to deal with people who'd consumed too much at weekends and during big events, to take the strain off ambulances and accident and emergency departments.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“It's clear people who've consumed too much alcohol are putting an immense and unnecessary strain on the ambulance service.

“No-one will be more annoyed than hardworking paramedics that this particular challenge stands in the way of helping patients who've fallen ill through no fault of their own.

“What's more worrying is the real scale of this will be so much higher, as these are only the incidents when the Scottish Ambulance Service has deemed

it necessary to specifically record alcohol as a factor.

“The SNP government needs to ensure ambulance staff are sufficiently resourced to deal with current challenges, and regrettably that includes alcohol.

“We need to start discussing measures that could take the pressure off paramedics when dealing with this, including the possible role of temporary units in towns and cities to deal with those who’ve consumed too much, meaning they wouldn’t need to go to A&E or trouble the ambulance service.”

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Nicola Sturgeon should stop blaming Brexit and start examining her own government’s record when it comes to the economy, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

A report by the respected Fraser of Allander Institute this week blamed a cluttered landscape of strategies for choking Scotland’s economic growth since the SNP came to power in 2007.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson reeled off the “myriad” of approaches the SNP had launched, none of which have sparked an economic turnaround.

Growth north of the border is a third of the whole UK, while the confidence of small businesses is also significantly lower.

However, at First Minister’s Questions today, Ms Sturgeon instead blamed Brexit – which won’t happen for another year – for the country’s past and present economic struggles.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Scotland is economically underperforming, and it has been since the SNP came to power more than a decade ago.

“Instead of blaming Brexit, Nicola Sturgeon needs to look closer to home.

“We’ve had 10 wasted years under this SNP government, and its record is nothing short of appalling.

“We have the lowest rate of business growth, the worst productivity in eight years, and the weakest projected growth of any country in the EU and OECD.

“The SNP can’t blame Brexit for any of that – it’s something that’s not even happened yet.

“It’s the decisions taken by the nationalists to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK and hammer businesses with unnecessary levies which are causing the real damage.”

[SNP has no idea how much the new benefits system will cost](#)

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28 Mar 2018



The SNP has been criticised by the country’s public spending watchdog for failing to work out the cost of implementing newly devolved benefits systems.

In a report to be published tomorrow, Audit Scotland said ministers should publish the projected costs of the new Scotland Act powers, a warning it also issued to the SNP last year.

The UK Government has already handed Holyrood £200 million to bring in the new social security powers.

But auditors said it will cost “much more than £200 million to implement all these powers”, and that additional costs would have to come from the overall Scottish budget.

The organisation said more transparency was required from the SNP, and warned “significant” work would be required to get all systems ready to deliver the new powers, particularly in IT.

Implementing new social security powers would be “hugely complex”, the report added, and more work is needed to ensure sufficiently skilled staff are in place to deliver these.

There was also a warning that it would be “challenging” to ensure enough

workers would be found in time.

The Scottish Government has already spent £62 million implementing new powers, and ministers themselves estimate the new social security powers alone will cost £308 million over the next four years.

Audit Scotland added: “The way the Scottish economy performs relative to the rest of the UK will have a greater influence on public finances than ever before.”

Scottish Conservative shadow social security secretary Adam Tomkins said:

“In short, the SNP simply hasn’t done its homework when it comes to the huge challenge of implementing these significant new powers that are coming to Holyrood.

“The nationalists are about to learn not only how difficult it is to achieve a fair welfare system that’s affordable and sustainable, but how complex it is to get it up and running.

“It’s incredible that the SNP government hasn’t at least attempted to work out how much this is going to cost.

“If ministers are caught out by these costs, the excess cash will have to come from the budget, and that will mean schools, hospitals and other public services being short-changed.

“Time is running out, and the people of Scotland will not forgive the SNP government if it makes a mess of the processing of this.

“We’ve seen what a farce the SNP managed to make with processing CAP payments for farmers in recent years.

“If that’s repeated with social security money, the chaos will be unprecedented.”

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- Consultation launched on better protection for animals in pet shops

26 Mar 2018



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for there to be better protection for animals sold in pet shops throughout Scotland.

Scottish Conservative MSP Jeremy Balfour is today launching a consultation on a member's bill that will ensure that local authorities have more power to protect the welfare of pets sold in shops.

Research from animal charity Blue Cross has found the current legislation governing pet shops, the Pet Animals Act 1951, is outdated, leading to issues with enforcement and interpretation as the legislation is being inconsistently applied.

The new member's bill would seek to increase the transparency and consistency of standards required for pet shops, and give local authorities the tools they need to ensure effective compliance.

The Scottish Conservatives said the change should lead to better conditions for animals and ensure that Scots purchasing animals from pet shops are confident that they have been raised responsibly.

Scottish Conservative MSP for the Lothians Jeremy Balfour MSP said:

"With animal welfare being a fully devolved issue, the Scottish Parliament has a real opportunity to improve the lives of pets and pet owners across Scotland.

"Current legislation governing the sale of pets is outdated and failing to protect animals or pet owners.

"Every pet bought from a pet shop, no matter the species, is important to their new owner. It is the latest addition to their family.

"Every Scot wants their pet to have had the best start in life and be in good health at the point of sale.

"This legislation will ensure our system is sufficiently robust to protect animal welfare and enable the public to buy with confidence, safe in the knowledge that the pet shop they are buying from is a reputable, licensed establishment which has been subject to a stringent licensing process."

Nigel Baker, the CEO of the Pet Industry Federation said:

"As the UK trade association for pet businesses, the Pet Industry Federation (PIF) welcomes the launch of Jeremy Balfour's consultation on pet shop licensing.

"At over 60 years old, the legislation governing pet shops sales in Scotland is very outdated, and doesn't fully take into account the changing business models around pet sales that have emerged in that time.

"The legislation is in urgent need of an overhaul in order to safeguard animal welfare and ensure that standards of licensing and inspection are applied and enforced consistently across Scotland."

Becky Thwaites, Head of Public Affairs at Blue Cross said:

“We have been pleased to work with Jeremy Balfour MSP on this proposal to improve the licensing of pet shops across Scotland.

“Current legislation around the selling of pets is vastly outdated and we welcome the opportunity to bring it up-to-date to better protect the welfare of pets in Scotland.

“We hope that interested parties will take the opportunity to take part in this consultation to ensure both pets and their owners are protected at the point of sale.”

A link to the consultation document is available here:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108075.aspx>

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13 Mar 2018



Figures released today on chronic pain have revealed a Scottish health board made almost all of its patients wait too long for treatment.

ISD Scotland stated just six per cent of people living with months of chronic pain in NHS Ayrshire and Arran were seen to within the target 18 weeks in the last three months of 2017.

It means 221 people waited beyond that timeframe for a first appointment at a pain clinic or service, with only 14 being dealt with on time.

Other health boards also struggled with the target, with NHS Grampian seeing just a quarter of chronic pain patients on time, and Dumfries and Galloway only 59 per cent.

Across Scotland, there was a 72.3 per cent compliance rate with the 18-week target.

The statistics come despite the issue of pain receiving more prominence, with campaigners and opposition politicians repeatedly calling for better care of those with chronic pain, which is defined by experts as continuous, long-lasting pain which has persisted for more than three months.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs currently co-convenes the Scottish Parliament's cross party group on chronic pain.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Life can be utterly miserable for someone living with chronic pain.

"To make them wait more than 18 weeks for an appointment is verging on scandalous, and it's hard to see what the excuse for this could be.

"The national average of 72.3 per cent is bad enough, but for one health board to be seeing just six per cent of people in this time is shocking.

"Chronic pain is a matter of extreme importance and should be regarded as such by the SNP government.

"The nationalists have been in charge of health for more than 10 years, and the failings in this area are all on them."