

Report reveals 20% cut to pothole funding

12 Feb 2018



Funding to maintain Scotland's roads has been cut by a fifth over the last seven years, a new report has revealed.

Cosla's Local Government Benchmarking Framework report stated cash invested in roads maintenance to tackle issues like potholes had decreased heavily since 2010 in real terms.

It fell from £691 million in 2010/11, to £554 million last year.

In addition, spending on street cleaning is down 30 per cent, funding for culture and leisure services has reduced by 17 per cent, and in education, investment per school pupil has also dropped.

It was warned that the SNP's reforms to education were jeopardising the drive to close Scotland's attainment gap.

Overall, the report confirmed, council funding from the SNP government has plummeted by more than seven per cent in the last seven years.

Scottish Conservative local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said:

"People right across the country are getting completely fed up with the state of roads.

"From motorways to small residential streets, there are just too many potholes and too many problems.

"We can now see the reason for this is the SNP's decision to slash funding.

"The SNP government now needs to explain why it has decided to do this, and why it thinks motorists don't deserve to drive on good quality surfaces.

"Clearly council budgets have been cut to the bone by the SNP.

"That's nothing to do with Westminster, Brexit, or anything else the nationalists like the point their finger at.

"It's a choice made by this SNP government which hard-pressed local authorities are struggling to live with."

On education spending, Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"The SNP claims that education is its top priority, most especially cutting

the attainment gap.

“However, this report shows that there are concerns about how the SNP’s reforms are being implemented and that this could be jeopardising that very goal.

“The SNP government asked to be judged on education. To date, there is little sign of progress.”

[Campaign to create accredited ‘dementia-friendly’ tourism register for Scotland](#)

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- Campaign to create accredited ‘dementia-friendly’ tourism register for Scotland

11 Feb 2018



A register of dementia-friendly tourist destinations should be created to help sufferers and boost the sector, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

It would enable attractions north of the border to become accredited sites for people with conditions like Alzheimer’s, as well as their carers.

And with an estimated 850,000 people living with dementia in the UK, the move could boost visitor numbers for a range of businesses.

Shadow culture secretary Rachael Hamilton came up with the plan after submitting a written question to the Scottish Government, asking if it had a register of specific dementia-friendly locations.

No such list exists, ministers confirmed, and now Ms Hamilton has called for an accreditation scheme to be launched.

She said the Scottish Government could support businesses to embark on a range of measures to make their attraction more accessible for dementia sufferers.

That could include the creation of a quiet room for patients to take a “time out” during a visit; creating clearer working and signs for directions and advice; and changing the colour of doors to make them easier to locate.

Experts have also suggested hosting memory cafes and workshops, and organising bespoke tours for care homes as ways to help patients and carers.

Ms Hamilton added the Scottish Government could also support tourism firms who wanted to train staff in how to deal with challenges presented by visitors with dementia, and help in making necessary changes to any physical infrastructure.

Scottish Conservative shadow culture secretary Rachael Hamilton said:

“Creating a list of accredited dementia-friendly tourist sites would be of benefit to everyone.

“It would make a day out or short holiday for those living with the condition far more accessible and enjoyable, and of course would be of benefit to their carers.

“And it would immediately open the market to 1.7 million people in the UK, if you consider each visitor with dementia would likely have a carer accompanying too.

“The tourism industry in Scotland is more reliant on elderly customers than perhaps many people realise.

“The sector, like everyone else, has a role to play in improving the lives of these vulnerable patients, and this would be a good way to do it.

“It would mean trips to these attractions could become more feasible, and that in turn helps with a degree of independent living and keeping up levels of physical exercise.

“With the support of the Scottish Government and the input of charities, it would be relatively inexpensive for a tourist attraction to become officially dementia-friendly.

“I hope this is something all political parties in Scotland can get behind to make a positive difference for patients, carers and the tourism economy in general.”

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11 Feb 2018



Scottish Conservatives have called for action to be taken to ensure that the Scottish civil service remains impartial.

Scottish Conservative MSP Donald Cameron has written to the Permanent Secretary, Leslie Evans, calling for an end to the 'slow erosion of robust attitudes to impartiality and objectivity'.

It comes after it was revealed this week that John Swinney personally intervened in the content of FOI releases, and that Special Advisers routinely screen Freedom of Information requests for political content.

There have been a number of other incidents where the lines between politicians and civil servants have become blurred over the past eighteen months.

These include civil servants working under Swinney contacting witnesses ahead of appearances at a committee of the Scottish Parliament, and graphics being tweeted by Scottish Government accounts which used the SNP's party political language on Brexit.

In his letter, Highlands & Islands MSP Donald Cameron writes:

"I do not doubt the commitment of individual civil servants to public service.

"But the cumulative impression of these instances is enough to doubt the culture and leadership of the civil service.

"They paint a picture of creeping laxness, and the slow erosion of robust attitudes to impartiality and objectivity.

"The civil service must not just act above party politics; it must avoid even the impression of politicisation.

"It is hard to see how that impression can currently be maintained.

"As the head of the Scottish Civil service, I look to you for a response – and reassurance that action will be taken to address this situation."

[Scottish Conservatives offer to help SNP pass reform to police structures](#)

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- Scottish Conservatives offer to help SNP pass reform to police structures

9 Feb 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have said the SNP should pass a new law to increase oversight of Scottish policing – and have offered to “donate” their parliamentary time to help.

There is a parliamentary majority for creating a greater role for the Scottish Parliament in the appointment of the chair of the Scottish Police Authority.

If the SNP wanted to, it could bring forward a bill immediately. With the current schedule of legislation, and with the support of all political parties, that could likely be passed this year.

Opposition parties have regular debating slots, and if more time is needed to pass an SPA reform bill, the Scottish Conservatives have offered to lend some of their time.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Susan Deacon is widely respected, but what we’ve learnt is that this goes far deeper than one person – this is an issue about wider governance and structures.

“All opposition parties want to increase the independence of the SPA, and Nicola Sturgeon has hinted that she’s open to the idea.

“But her warning that it would take new laws rings hollow. If the SNP wants to bring forward a bill, then it could do it in days.

“And if it needs more debating time – we’ll donate some of our opposition time to sorting out the mess.

“We’re now putting our money where our mouth is. So should Nicola Sturgeon.”

[SNP’s £500k a day on NHS agency staff](#)

9 Feb 2018



The SNP is spending nearly £500k per day on agency staff in the Scottish NHS,

it has been revealed.

The figure emerged following a parliamentary question by shadow health secretary Miles Briggs, and shows more than £171 million was paid out to private agencies last year.

And while it's a small decrease from last year, this still represents double the amount spent when the SNP came to office in 2007.

Despite protestations against private funding in the NHS, the SNP has increased agency funding to record levels.

Several health boards have seen dramatic increases in their spending on agency staff, including Ayrshire and Arran where there was an increase of almost £3 million, and Grampian where the figure rose by £4 million.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Agency staff are really important in our NHS as they are flexible and can fill short-term staffing gaps, as well as reducing waiting lists.

“However the SNP mismanagement of the NHS has clearly led to a long term reliance on agency staff at very high cost.

“These figures expose the utter hypocrisy of the SNP as it has consistently spoken against private involvement in the NHS whilst spending half a million pounds each day to agency staff.

“The SNP has totally failed to ensure that staffing levels in the NHS are sufficient, and with morale at rock bottom among doctors and nurses, this will only get worse.

“It's time the SNP took responsibility for this situation, get on with the day job, and make sure our NHS has enough staff to function properly”.