

Stamp duty black hole would be 3x worse but for UK Government initiative

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28 Sep 2017



The SNP's £55 million shortfall in land and buildings transaction tax would be nearly three times higher were it not for a copied UK Government policy, it has emerged.

It was confirmed this week that the Scottish Government's forecast for stamp duty income was 10 per cent off, bringing in £483 million last year.

Now it's been revealed that £100 million of that figure came from a new surcharge on buy-to-let second homes, an initiative the nationalists lifted from the Conservative government in Westminster.

At First Minister's Questions today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson slammed the SNP's LBTT rates, which she pointed out were not only blowing a hole in the country's budget, but making it harder for people to buy "their first proper home".

Housing experts have said, with fewer homes selling at the higher end of the market, it's slowing down movement for everyone else.

Those organisations have blamed the rates of LBTT set by ministers, suggesting they are amended to encourage an upturn in the sector.

Revenue Scotland papers confirm that, in 2016/17, more than £100 million was received in tax receipts thanks to the Additional Dwelling Supplement, which sees an extra tariff placed on those buying second homes.

That accounted for more than 20 per cent of all LBTT revenues.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP collected £55 million less than it said it would, blowing a hole in Nicola Sturgeon's budget.

"But this shortfall would have been almost three times worse were it not for a policy it adopted straight from the UK Government.

"It's bad enough that the public purse is suffering from the SNP's botched reform of stamp duty.

“But it’s squeezing Scottish families in some parts of the county out of their first home.

“This was the very first new tax administered by this SNP government, but the First Minister has got it completely wrong.

“She should listen to the property and housing experts and make changes to get the market moving.”

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Criminals can embark on illegal activity knowing they have an equal chance of not getting caught after clear-up rates dropped to 50 per cent, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Official statistics were released today on recorded crime, which also revealed an increase in violent crime and sex offences.

They showed that last year Police Scotland only solved 50 per cent of all crimes, compared to 51.6 per cent in 2015.

The statistics indicated a general decrease in crime, but left out thousands of offences from the official recording, including some categories of assault.

Despite that, violent crime was up six per cent, while an increase in sex offences was attributed to a rise in online offending.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“The fall in clear-up rates will be immensely concerning to people right across the country.

“We’re now in a situation where criminals know they literally have a 50/50 chance of getting away with their illegal activity.

“Much more needs to be done by the Scottish Government to help police increase these clear-up rates.

“What these figures also show is crime is changing, particularly when it comes to sexual offences and the internet.

“That’s why a balance has to be struck between properly resourcing those who tackle cyber-crime, while not decimating the frontline at the same time.

“The SNP will no doubt boast about record low levels of crime, but everyone knows this has to be taken with a pinch of salt, particularly given some serious offences aren’t included in these figures.

“The reality is we have a police force in crisis, and that’s doing a disservice to the hardworking officers on the frontline the length and breadth of the country.”

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The SNP has reduced the number of additional support teachers in Scotland – even though the proportion of children who need extra help in the classroom has risen to nearly one in four.

Figures will be presented to MSPs tomorrow which show 170,329 youngsters are deemed to require additional support for learning, 24.9 per cent of all school pupils.

That’s a huge increase from 2015, when 153,000 needed ASL, roughly 22.5 per cent of pupils.

And in 2010, just 10.3 per cent were considered suitable for ASL, around 70,000 children.

Despite that, Holyrood’s education committee will be given statistics revealing there are just 2990 teachers with ASL as their main subject, compared to 3038 the previous year.

It's also a drop of 15 per cent from 2010, despite the clear trend of more pupils needing help in the classroom.

The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly called for ministers to take more action to help ASL pupils, yet the position appears to be getting worse under the SNP.

It's the latest set of statistics exposing the teacher recruitment crisis, with some schools even being forced to ask parents to help out.

Scottish Conservative early years spokeswoman Michelle Ballantyne said:

"These figures very clearly show that those pupils who need help the most are being badly let down.

"This will do nothing to close the attainment gap, nor boost opportunities for those young people who need help in the classroom.

"Of course much of the increase in pupils with additional learning needs will be down to a better identification of those requiring assistance.

"But that's no good if the teachers aren't there to provide that help.

"This is a clear trend, and one the SNP has to explain as matter of urgency.

"The nationalists keep saying education is their priority, yet these figures suggest that is anything but the case."

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Hundreds of patients across Scotland have been forced to wait more than two months for cancer treatment to begin, despite being urgently referred by a medic.

ISD Scotland figures showed that 86.9 per cent of people were seen to within 62 days, the worst since figures for the standard began in 2012.

Health boards have a target of seeing 95 per cent of patients in that

timeframe, yet in some parts of mainland Scotland nearly one in five had to wait longer.

Today's figures cover from April to June this year, during which 3493 were urgently referred after a suspicion of cancer was detected.

Of those, only 3034 were treated within 62 days, the figures show.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said the performance was indicative of a staffing and resource crisis across the whole NHS.

He blamed the SNP's disastrous workforce planning, which has seen recent vacancy rates among nurses and consultants increase to the highest ever.

He also pointed to a crisis within radiology north of the border, which last month culminated in staff sending x-rays to Australia to be analysed due to a lack of resources here.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"It's inexcusable for so many people who've been urgently referred on suspicion of cancer to wait more than two months.

"Not only will these patients and their families be beside themselves with worry in this period, but with every day that goes past their chances of a good prognosis deteriorate.

"There's no point in constantly publicising the importance of checking out cancer fears at an early stage if the NHS isn't well sufficiently resourced to hold up its end of the deal.

"This is completely on the SNP's head.

"It's had full charge of the NHS for a decade, and now this performance has slipped to such an unacceptable low, it's time for a proper apology from the nationalists.

"The SNP has also been well-warned about a crisis in radiography but is failing to act.

"That failure results in shocking statistics like this."

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- Social workers fear named person plans are 'toxic'

26 Sep 2017



Social workers will tell MSPs tomorrow that revised plans to introduce a named person for every child in Scotland are "toxic" and should be scrapped.

The proposals have left social workers – many of whom will be expected to act as named persons – "confused and even worried about the action they should take", the education committee will hear.

And in its evidence, the Scottish Association of Social Workers will say its members fear being "regarded as agents of state surveillance or control, as opposed to a service to support and protect".

Manager Trisha Hall will say: "Some of our members have strongly suggested this bill has become toxic and should simply be repealed."

The evidence from the organisation is the latest hammer blow for the SNP over its controversial named person plans.

The Supreme Court last year ruled elements of the scheme unlawful, and new plans to address that are being consistently criticised by a range of experts.

Last week, the Law Society said practitioners of named person would need lawyers "on speed dial" in relation to confusion over information sharing.

Tomorrow, the SASW will add that, far from helping them, named person could make it more difficult to assist vulnerable young people.

The evidence will warn: "Our members are concerned that an increase in referrals may lead to a bottleneck in the system and subsequent overload, and this in-turn could result in child protection referrals not receiving the attention they should get."

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"These are the very people who would be tasked with implementing the named person plans, and the SNP should listen.

"The concerns set out here show just what a mess these proposals are.

"The SNP thinks it is protecting young people by imposing a named person on every child, when in fact it risks making things worse.

"Social workers are understandably concerned about their workload, their reputation and above all their ability to protect those who need help the most.

"That's why the nationalists should swallow their pride and scrap named

person proposals altogether.”

Ends

Notes to editors:

To see the evidence from the Scottish Association of Social Workers, go to page 15 of the document here:

http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/20170927Meeting_papers.pdf

Last week at First Minister’s Questions, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said the SNP should scrap named person and think again:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/09/sturgeon-told-to-scrap-named-person-and-start-again/>