

Percentage of CPOs completed drops again

21 Feb 2017



The percentage of community payback orders (CPOs) being completed has dropped once again according to Scottish Government statistics.

Only 67.6% of orders were completed in 2015/16, down from 68% the year before, and 70.3% in 2013/14.

It indicates a worrying trend of orders not being completed.

The Scottish Conservatives have called on an urgent review of the orders to ensure that criminals don't start treating them with contempt.

It also follows reports last year that CPOs were being issued for more serious crimes such as rape and child sex offences.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

"These figures show that a third of those being issued with Community Payback Orders aren't even completing them.

"Victims and communities are rapidly losing faith in this system and you have to question what sort of punishment these orders are providing if there is such a high chance that those on CPOs will be allowed off the hook.

"There is a real chance that criminals start treating them with contempt, and we need to ensure that CPOs once again act as a proper punishment.

"When we've seen them being handed out for crimes as serious as rape, it is even more galling that so many are not being completed.

"Although there is a place in our justice system for community payback orders, we need to ensure that they are being properly administered, and are being issued for appropriate crimes."

The Scottish Government figures are available here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00514220.pdf>

The figures regarding completion of orders are available in Table 2.

The Scottish Conservatives brought up the issue of CPOs being handed out for serious crimes in FMQs last September:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2016/09/demand-for-urgent-review-after-r>

SNP must “mind the gap” on tax

21 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are warning the SNP that they must “mind the gap” with the rest of the UK ahead of today’s key vote on tax rates.

The warning comes as the Scottish Parliament prepares to vote for the first time to set new rates of income tax, following the successful implementation of the new Scotland Act.

The SNP Government – under pressure from the Greens – has decided to reject a plan to lift middle earners out of the higher rate of tax, as proposed elsewhere in the UK.

It will instead freeze the rate – dragging police officers, senior teachers and nurses into paying it.

The Scottish Conservatives will today step up their call for the SNP Government to prioritise economic growth by setting competitive tax rates no higher than the rest of the UK.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

“Over the last 18 months, Scotland’s growth rate has been around a third of that for the UK – with the result that employment is now falling in Scotland.

□“The SNP’s plans to set tax rates higher than the rest of the UK will only worsen this growing divide we are seeing, deterring investment and reducing new jobs.

“Our message to the SNP today is clear: it needs to mind the gap. Higher taxes in Scotland means lower growth, which will deliver less cash for government to spend on our vital public services.”

“Derek Mackay’s handling of the business rates crisis has shown that this Scottish Government simply does not understand business and the economy.

“It is must start to listen to job creators who need a Government which goes for growth, not one which punishes aspiration.”

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20 Feb 2017



Finance secretary Derek Mackay will face Holyrood for the first time tomorrow on the escalating business rates crisis.

He will be quizzed as part of topical questions as firms up and down the country warn about the devastating impact of the revaluation.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking on the matter.

The Scottish Conservatives last week demanded a statement by Mr Mackay amid accusations ministers have been slow act.

The SNP was warned last year there would be a “severe” impact on various industries if business rates changes go ahead.

However, it has taken until this week for Mr Mackay to respond formally in front of MSPs.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Businesses across Scotland want to hear what the Scottish Government is going to do about all this.

“Now we will have that chance in the Scottish Parliament.

“Firms that face going to the wall and people whose jobs are in jeopardy will be extremely interested in the answer.

“This is fast-becoming a crisis, affecting organisations large and small, and in all areas of the country.

“The SNP needs to take urgent action.”

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser has been selected to ask the following question in Holyrood tomorrow:

“To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reported concerns from businesses regarding the non-domestic rates

revaluation.”

The Scottish Conservatives demanded a statement last week:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/02/demand-for-urgent-holyrood-statement-on-business-rates/>

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- Greater focus needed on supporting the “switched on” generation

20 Feb 2017



Speaking at a major social media conference today, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson called for a greater focus on supporting the “switched on” generation.

She pointed to recent figures which show a marked increase in incidence of depression among young people, especially teenage girls.

Researchers have pinned much of the rise on the hostility of the new social media environment being faced by young people.

Today’s conference was organised by Twitter and Scottish Conservative mental health spokesman Miles Briggs, who is campaigning for the NHS to give more support for mental health issues.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Social media is a great communications tool which has brought us closer together. But we must also face up to the negative side it has brought too.

“The switched on world is piling huge pressures on young women, and men, to live up to unreachable expectations.

“Young people are being made to feel constantly judged, often harshly. We know that the rise of online bullying has become a major factor in the decline in mental health among young people.

“We need to see government providing people with the education they need on how to tackle this new world and stay psychologically healthy at the same time.

“That includes far greater access to mental health professional in GPs and hospitals. It also means providing more counselling in secondary schools, so that mental health problems can be picked up early.

“The platforms have a duty of care to their members. They must recognise that free speech for some can carry a cost to others.

“Transparent rules for engagement and clear penalties – including having accounts suspended – must be outlined so everyone knows where they stand.

“And sites could provide free notifications or sponsored posts for those organisations and charities offering support – be it the Samaritans, SamH or Breathing Space.

“Reminding people that there is help available can absolutely be part of a forum’s corporate social responsibility.

“Most of all though, we need to take responsibility for our own actions. We have to own what we tweet.

“Debate and disagreement can be good, but it should never cross the line.”

[ScotRail forks out £2k a day in compensation to disgruntled passengers](#)

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- ScotRail forks out £2k a day in compensation to disgruntled passengers

18 Feb 2017



Train passengers are handed more than £2000 a day in compensation from Scotrail amid complaints of cancellations and delays.

Figures obtained by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed £587,527 was paid out by bosses between April and December 2016 to commuters.

The majority of these payments were for delayed trains, as transport minister Humza Yousaf faced pressure on the quality and reliability of Scotland’s trains.

Of the half-million total, £340,000 was given to those who complained of delay, with £52,000 handed to others as a “gesture of goodwill”.

The Freedom of Information request also showed there was £178,000 paid out

under various Scotrail “policies”, which the organisation describes as full or partial refunds given out to those passengers who feel the agreed level of service wasn’t reached.

In total, more than 40,000 people successfully sought compensation in nine months.

The table also shows a radical increase in both passengers affected and the amount of money paid.

In April, there were 1963 people who claimed £24,244 in compensation.

But by December, when the trains crisis began to intensify, that rose to 9224 claiming £94,878.

Scottish Conservative transport spokesman Liam Kerr said:

“The rising cost of compensation appears to reflect the nosedive in quality and reliability experienced by passengers on Scotland’s trains.

“It’s no surprise the bill has surpassed £500,000 for the last nine months when you consider the problems on our railways.

“As well as passengers, you have to feel for the staff who are doing their best with no help from the Scottish Government, and they will be wondering how transport minister Humza Yousaf ever allowed it to get this bad.

“And even if this cost isn’t coming directly from the public purse, passengers and taxpayers – including those who never even use a railway – will end up paying.

“It’s vital the situation on Scotland’s railways is sorted out.

“What worries me the most is, as with so many other public services, the Scottish Government has been completely neglectful, focusing on a renewed drive for independence rather than the day job of running the country.”