

Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

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- Lack of SNP planning sees courts and police buildings lying dormant

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Around one in six Police Scotland buildings are not in daily use, while the Scottish Government is sitting on £1 million worth of empty courtrooms.

Information obtained by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that, of 412 police properties across Scotland, 60 are “not currently in day-to-day use”.

And the research also revealed that sheriff courts which have shut, but not sold, total an estimated value of around £1.13 million.

The Scottish Conservatives have said it shows a lack of forward-planning by the SNP, which is prepared to oversee the closure of courts and police buildings without thinking about what to do with the buildings thereafter.

Police Scotland embarked on a programme of front counter closures in 2014, and outlined plans for even more to shut last year.

The Scottish Conservatives criticised that move, saying people still valued local police stations and they played an important role in cutting crime.

In its response to the party’s Freedom of Information request, Police Scotland said: “Out of 412 properties, 60 are not currently in day-to-day use. A number of those are still used occasionally and some are subject to ongoing engagement with stakeholders regarding future use.”

A number of court closures have also occurred on the SNP’s watch, with 17 sheriff and justice of the peace facilities closing since the decision was announced in 2013.

However, it has now emerged many of these buildings are still on the taxpayer’s books, including Arbroath, valued at £240,000; Cupar, valued at £200,000; and Stonehaven, valued at £330,000.

The Scottish Conservatives also criticised the court closures programmes, warning it would make life harder for victims and witnesses, and add an additional burden to those courts remaining.

Scottish Conservative MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of Holyrood’s justice committee, said:

“We were critical of SNP plans to close police stations and court buildings from the outset.

“But what this shows is that those proposals went on regardless, without any thought as to what to do with the buildings.

“It means the public has far reduced access to justice, yet the taxpayer hasn’t benefited as a result.

“In the face of the absolute refusal to change its mind on these closures, at the very least the money raised from their sale, now the Scottish Government has deemed them surplus to requirements, could go some way to improving justice in Scotland.

“It’s yet another example of the SNP making sweeping decisions without even trying to think the whole process through.”

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from the Scottish Courts Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Scottish-Courts-FOI-response.pdf>

To see a copy of the Freedom of Information response from Police Scotland, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Police-FOI-response.pdf>

The Scottish Government’s programme of police station closures has been roundly criticised:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-37850332>

Similarly, the nationalists have been under fire for closing a fifth of Scotland’s courts:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2015/09/sheriff-courts-less-efficient-in-wake-of-snp-closure-programme/>

[Scotland ‘playing catch-up’ on education under the SNP](#)

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- Scotland ‘playing catch-up’ on education under the SNP



Scotland is “playing catch” up when it “used to lead the world” on education, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Pointing to a damning report by education experts the Sutton Trust, leader Ruth Davidson said the blame lay entirely at the door of an SNP government which has been in charge for 10 years.

The issue dominated First Minister’s Questions today, but Nicola Sturgeon was unable to offer any explanation for the dreadful findings.

In addition, new analysis has illustrated just how badly Scottish pupils are lagging their contemporaries around the world.

Using PISA statistics released at the end of last year, the Scottish Conservatives found 15-year-old Scottish pupils are:

- **Two years behind Singapore on science**
- **One year behind Ireland and Canada on reading**
- **One year behind Estonia and the Czech Republic on maths**

It backs up conclusions in the Sutton Trust report which states: “There is no specific area where able children in Scotland really excel.”

It also found there had been “a pronounced and sustained decline in able pupils’ performance in science, equivalent to around a year of schooling” north of the border.

Today, Ruth also challenged the First Minister on why a scheme to twin flagship schools with underperforming ones had been dropped by the Scottish Government.

And she urged the SNP to do more than simply launch poster campaigns when it came to attracting more people to the teaching profession.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Scotland used to lead the world in education, but under a decade of SNP government we are now playing catch-up.

“Pupils are not only falling behind their contemporaries south of the border, but are struggling in comparison with countries right across the world.

“That’s the legacy of this SNP government’s 10 years in power.

“It is in sole charge of education and has no-one else to blame.

“The Sutton Trust made a range of recommendations, but Nicola Sturgeon seems unwilling to commit to any of them.

“This inaction is harming the prospects of our children and, considering the First Minister wants to be judged on education, it’s clear much more needs to be done.”

For more information on the Sutton Trust report, visit:

<http://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/three-year-attainment-gap-between-poor-pupils-and-their-better-off-classmates-separates-britains-brightest-teenage-girls/>

For the methodology on the comparative PISA findings, contact the Scottish Conservative press office.

[Fraser: Jobs boom would net SNP Government £800m](#)

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- Fraser: Jobs boom would net SNP Government £800m

7 Feb 2017



The Scottish Government would gain a near £800m budget bonus if Scotland's jobs market delivered for all working people, finance spokesman Murdo Fraser will say in a key note speech this evening.

Delivering his response to last week's SNP budget in a Reform Scotland lecture, Mr Fraser will call on the Nationalist government to focus on economic growth – saying it will deliver extra cash to the SNP Government's coffers.

Figures compiled by the party show that if all part-time workers who want a full-time job could get one, tax revenues to the Scottish Government would increase by £337m.

Similarly, if inactive people who want a job also found one, the Scottish Government would stand to gain by £435m in extra income tax.

Mr Fraser will say that this combined £772m windfall provides an illustration of the kind of budget boost the SNP would gain if it only prioritised jobs over tax rises.

The Scottish Conservatives have already shown that simply by increasing the proportion of higher and additional rate taxpayers to the UK average, the SNP Government would stand to gain £600m in extra revenue.

Instead, as part of a deal with the Scottish Greens last week, the SNP

decided to set the highest income tax rates in the UK for Scotland – and failed to set out a plan to deliver economic growth.

In his speech, hosted by Shepherd and Wedderburn , Mr Fraser will say:

“As the Fraser of Allander institute point out: ‘Scotland’s economic performance – or more accurately, Scotland’s relative performance – will have a greater bearing on the spending plans of Holyrood than ever before’”

“To see what the potential benefit could be, we did some basic modelling, trying to understand what the impact would be if Scotland’s economy motored up a gear.

“If Scotland matched the UK proportions of higher and additional rate taxpayers, tax revenues would increase by around £600 million.

“If every person in Scotland currently on a part-time contract who wants to go full-time could do so – revenues would increase by about £337 million.

“And if everyone in Scotland who is currently economic inactive and wants to find a job – but can’t – if they found work, revenues would increase by £435 million.

“These figures give you a sense of potential if we grew faster, and reached UK-wide norms.

“And of course – it’s not just me saying it. Alex Salmond, remember, estimated that matching UK growth would be worth £4 billion.

“I wonder what Alex Salmond would make of Derek Mackay’s budget.

“And I miss that old SNP.

“We might have had our differences, but at least we agreed on this guiding principle of government: if you want more money for services, start with growth.

“Bairns not tax bombs, you could say.”

[Time for SNP and Labour to become ‘born-again democrats’](#)

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- Time for SNP and Labour to become ‘born-again democrats’



The SNP and Labour should become “born-again democrats” and accept the result of the EU referendum, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Speaking at a Scottish Parliament debate today – dubbed by Nicola Sturgeon as the most historic in Holyrood history – chief whip John Lamont criticised political opponents for seeking to reject the Article 50 process.

And turning on its head a nationalist accusation that the Scottish Conservatives were “born-again Brexiteers”, he said it was “time for the SNP to accept the result of the EU referendum”.

Today’s debate brings the total number of hours Brexit has been debated to 37, compared with just eight hours on education, something the SNP claims to be a priority.

Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont said:

“The SNP is keen to call the Scottish Conservatives ‘born-again Brexiteers’, but perhaps it’s time for the nationalists to become born-again democrats.

“They’ve been on the losing side of two recent referendums, and seem unable to accept the result of either.

“And with today’s performance, it seems Scottish Labour aren’t much better at accepting the will of the people.

“The Scottish Government should be focusing on getting the best deal for both Scotland and the UK.

“It should be looking for the right solution for Scotland’s needs, especially on matters like farming, fisheries, trade and research support.

“We are entering a challenging time, with pitfalls to be avoided and opportunities to be seized.

“The next two years must not be about game-playing, grandstanding or political posturing.”

[Stats reveal health board where 1 in 5 operations are cancelled](#)

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- Stats reveal health board where 1 in 5 operations are cancelled

7 Feb 2017



A Scottish health board was forced to cancel a fifth of planned operations in December, new figures have revealed.

ISD Scotland data showed, in NHS Highland, 19 per cent of elective operations were called off.

Around half of those were due to capacity issues within hospitals in the area.

Nationwide, 10.1 per cent of operations were cancelled, the highest in almost a year.

It is the latest set of statistics illustrating the difficulties being faced by the NHS around Christmas.

Health boards are continually failing to hit the four-hour waiting time for accident and emergency patients, while delayed discharge continues to be a problem.

Other reasons set out by ISD Scotland for cancellations are hospitals scrapping procedures for clinical reasons, and patients themselves deciding against going under the knife.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Everyone appreciates the winter months are the toughest for health boards to deal with.

“But even so, for one in five planned operations to be cancelled is nothing short of dreadful.

“It’s a massive inconvenience for patients across the Highlands, many of whom are vulnerable and in need of care, and may well be coming a long distance.

“There will always be occasions when the patient wants to cancel the procedure, but this is clearly far too high a statistic.

“The SNP has been in sole charge of health for a decade now and this falls squarely at its door.

“NHS Highland has not had its problems to seek, and it’s essential these appalling figures are not repeated in future months.”

To see a spreadsheet of all cancelled procedures, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2017-02-07-Cancellations.xlsx>