

Free childcare pledge at risk over SNP's last-minute approach

3 Mar 2020



The risk of the SNP's pledge to expand free childcare falling short "is both very likely" and "will have a very high impact", a report has found.

Audit Scotland has found a number of issues with Nicola Sturgeon's flagship promise to ensure all three and four-year-olds receive 1140 hours of free childcare a year.

With less than a year to go, around half the necessary staff still had to be recruited to provide the care expansion, while just 30 per cent of linked construction projects had been completed.

And the 'Early learning and childcare' follow-up report – which will be published in full tomorrow – stated that half of the new places which would be created through fresh infrastructure projects were due to finish in July and August, the very month the policy is due to come into effect.

Auditors said the risk of the infrastructure challenges jeopardising the policy were "both very likely to occur and will have a very high impact".

The report also said councils would have to recruit more than 2200 full-time staff between April and September to meet demand.

Other problems for the pledge include "increased uncertainty" for those who are meant to deliver it on the ground, and the fact the SNP government hasn't worked out how to measure the success of it in the long-term.

Despite the SNP repeatedly demanding all businesses pay fair wages, the report said its very own scheme may not meet living wage requirements.

And in general, the impact of the overall scheme "poses risks to the sustainability of childminding", auditors said.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Jamie Greene said:

"This was Nicola Sturgeon's flagship policy, yet the necessary work to make it happen has been left to the last minute.

"As ever, the First Minister wraps herself in flagship announcements but the reality ends up being completely different.

"When judged on her actual record on childcare and education she fails miserably.

"As it stands, the fact we're still waiting for so many buildings to be

finished and staff put in place, there's a huge risk that this won't happen in time.

"Audit Scotland itself states the SNP's planning simply hasn't been good enough.

"The First Minister promised the world to thousands of parents across Scotland when it came to free childcare.

"They will deliver a very damning verdict on her SNP government if this promise isn't up-and-running on time.

"And what ministers seem to have forgotten through all of this is that good childcare isn't just about the number of hours on offer, it's the flexibility within that."

[SNP must support Scottish fishermen in French trade row](#)

2 Mar 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have challenged the SNP to support the Scottish fishermen in the upcoming trade negotiations with the EU.

As the first round of trade talks get underway regarding the UK's departure from the EU, France has apparently already threatened a trade battle with the UK if British fishing rights are not part of the negotiations.

The UK government has stated that they will not trade away Britain's fishing rights.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation has stated that post Brexit, the UK must have sovereignty over who catches what, where and when. As a coastal state, the UK would then negotiate with the EU and others on an annual basis in international forums, similar to Norway and Iceland.

The Scottish Conservatives have therefore demanded that the SNP publicly declare who they back – UK ministers trying to secure Scotland's fishing assets, or France trying to gain further access.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow constitution secretary said:

"Scottish fishermen are clear that when we leave the EU at the end of this year, we must have full control of access to our coastal waters – like other coastal states. Our fishing fleet is not for sale.

“It is no surprise that France is already threatening a trade war if we do not put our fishing waters on the table – but now the SNP has a choice to make.

“The Scottish Conservatives have always supported our fishermen and we have consistently argued that the hated CFP must go.

“Now it’s decision time for the SNP: do they support this move by the French government, or do they support the UK defending our fishermen?

“Michael Russell must tell us: is he on the side of our fishermen, the communities and economies that depend on them, or not?”

[Time’s up for the SNP on Scotland’s education crisis](#)

27 Feb 2020



The SNP government has been told it’s run out of time to reverse falling standards in Scotland’s schools – after the education secretary said he needed longer to make improvements.

At First Minister’s Questions today, Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw challenged Nicola Sturgeon on declining exam pass rates.

It follows a late-night report released last week by John Swinney, which revealed concerns at the heart of government about the performance of pupils at all levels.

However, today Ms Sturgeon said she stood by Mr Swinney’s initial assessment that all was well with the education system, and that consistently falling pass rates still represented a “strong set of results”.

That’s despite his own report showing poorer showings in core subjects like English, Maths and History, and an admission that the attainment gap was not closing.

And when facing the media on the issue this week, the education secretary – whose SNP government has been in power for 13 years – said: “It takes time to improve an education system.”

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“The SNP government has been in sole charge of education for 13 years.

“But still Nicola Sturgeon wants even more time to fix the education system her SNP government has neglected.

“Generations of pupils have been failed, and teachers and parents have had enough of nationalist failure.

“Their time is up on education, and every other devolved area which they’ve made a mess of.”

[Greens and SNP come together for another ‘shambolic’ budget deal](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Posts](#)
- [All News](#)
- Greens and SNP come together for another ‘shambolic’ budget deal

26 Feb 2020



Parties whose main objective is to break up the UK have again come together to form a “shambolic” budget deal.

It was confirmed today that the Greens would now give their support to the SNP through the remainder of the budget process, having abandoned a number of their earlier demands.

However, despite welcoming some changes included today like more funding for police, the Scottish Conservatives said the revised budget still fell short.

Finance secretary Kate Forbes said the extra commitments would be paid for from extra Barnett Consequentials from the UK Government, and a mystery “reprofiling” of business rates.

Doubt has also been cast on the suggestion the budget would guarantee free bus travel for teenagers, with the SNP saying it would merely “support preparations” for the scheme to introduce it “if possible”.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Donald Cameron said:

“While some of the measures announced today are to be welcomed, this budget still falls well short of what our economy and public services need.

“It’s no wonder that the SNP has yet again tricked the Greens into supporting the budget, which is now becoming an increasingly laughable and humiliating situation for Patrick Harvie.

“There’s no commitment to free bus travel for young people, as the Greens seem to naively think, and the Green party seems to have dropped almost every other demand it previously made.

“Unless the SNP government commits to no further divergence from UK tax rates and adds an extra £15.4 million for drug rehabilitation beds, as well as properly resourcing the capital allocation to local authorities, we cannot support this budget.

“The vague suggestion of ‘reprofiling’ business rates will also set alarm bells ringing in Scotland’s business community, and is something the finance secretary will have to provide clarity on.

“Everyone knew the pro-independence parties would leap back into bed together when it mattered – but the main losers of this shambolic coupling are people who rely on public services and businesses who keep our economy going.”

[SNP must solve cladding crisis](#)

26 Feb 2020



Thousands of Scottish people are still living in uncertified properties that they cannot sell, as the Scottish Parliament’s local government committee heard this morning.

In evidence to the committee, UK Finance, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; the Law Society of Scotland and Property Managers Association Scotland indicated that thousands of homeowners could be affected by the current situation whereby surveyors cannot value properties with uncertified cladding.

Due to higher cladding standards in the rest of the UK, new Scottish flats are now being held to the safer standard, and property professionals cannot provide a valuation on that basis.

In addition, homeowners in older cladded flats are also liable to be penalised as new surveys, costing thousands of pounds are required.

Lastly, the matter of professional indemnity insurance was also raised. This is becoming less available and more expensive but it must be resolved by both the Scottish and UK governments so that surveyors will not be sued when providing a valuation for these properties.

Graham Simpson, Scottish Conservative shadow housing secretary said;

“It is astonishing that we do not yet have an immediate ban on combustible

material in cladding, as in the rest of the UK – the SNP government must introduce this as a matter of the utmost urgency.

“It is not right that properties are being built here to a lesser standard of fire safety than in England Wales, and then owners can’t get mortgages. It’s a crazy situation.

“With regards to the issues preventing mortgage valuations on property with substandard cladding, the Scottish Government must immediately convene a working group of key stakeholders to solve this problem in Scotland.

“They should also work with the UK government to ensure Scots homeowners aren’t being penalised for the increased protection in the rest of the UK.

“The Scottish government must consider setting up a remediation fund to help people who now face potentially ruinous bills and keep people safe.”