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- Call for more farming support after year of 'brutal' weather

17 Apr 2018



Farmers need increased financial support following 12 months of "brutal" weather for the industry, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Shadow rural affairs secretary Peter Chapman called on the Scottish Government to provide farmers across the country with additional help amid rising death rates of cattle and sheep.

He said the 'Beast from the East' has led to more fatalities of cows and sheep, while the poor weather across the previous summer and autumn reduced the quality of feed, leaving stock in poor condition.

Silage quality is also very poor, he added, with feed and straw stock scarce and expensive.

That comes on the back of farmers already struggling to cope with the SNP's farm payments fiasco, which starved rural Scotland of hundreds of millions of pounds in recent years.

Farming income across Scotland has almost halved in the past six years.

Scottish Conservative shadow rural affairs secretary Peter Chapman said:

"The farming sector has been struggling for some time and it's due to a range of factors.

"It's nobody's fault the weather has been so terrible, and of course there's very little that can be done to mitigate the impact at the time.

"But it's not just the 'Beast from the East' that's hurt farmers – the weather across the whole year has been very poor.

"There has been a big rise in deaths of cattle and sheep, and the quality of silage has been very poor – this all has a cost to an industry already struggling to get by.

"This is where the Scottish Government should step in to help.

"Our hill farmers in particular need some extra help at this time.

“Assistance with the lifting of fallen stock would be one thing that could be easily done.

“Getting rid of the hated three-crop rule for this year would also be warmly received.

“And it would all go some way to reversing the damage caused by the SNP’s shambolic handling of vital CAP payments in recent years.”

[Health visitor vacancies rise by 50% as SNP struggles to hit target](#)

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- Health visitor vacancies rise by 50% as SNP struggles to hit target

12 Apr 2018



Health visitor vacancy rates in Scotland have increased by half in the space of a year as the SNP struggles to honour a pledge on increasing numbers.

Official statistics have revealed there are currently 144 vacancies across the country, the equivalent of nearly one in 10 posts.

That compares to a vacancy rate of 6.7 per cent 12 months before.

It comes as the SNP looks set to fall short on its promise to employ 500 extra health visitors by this year, a commitment made in 2014.

However, with just 1448 currently in place, the Scottish Government remains off-course to hit that target.

The 144 empty roles currently compares to 101 in September, and only 49 two years ago.

And of the current vacancies, 62 have been unfilled for longer than three months.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said more efforts were needed to recruit additional health visitors.

She said it was crucial not just to provide better care for patients across Scotland, but to take the strain off those already struggling with a hefty workload.

According to nursing publications, there were 1114 whole-time equivalent health visitors at the time of the SNP government's commitment in the summer of 2014.

Latest ISD data states there are now 1448, meaning the goal for an extra 500 workers is short by 166.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

"The SNP made a promise to secure 500 extra health visitors, a commitment we welcomed, but it looks like that is going to fall short.

"For any department to have a vacancy rate of nearly 10 per cent is alarming, and shows the strain workers must be under.

"It follows a pattern across health and other public services of not enough staffing and poor workforce planning.

"Health visitors are crucial for a range of needs in our society, it's not something we can afford to scrimp on.

"The SNP should come clean about progress on this target, and explain how it's going to secure the additional 500 health visitors it promised."

[Motorists snub SNP's green vehicle loan scheme](#)

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- Motorists snub SNP's green vehicle loan scheme

11 Apr 2018



A finance scheme to persuade motorists to buy electric cars in Scotland has only been used 500 times since its launch in 2011.

Despite SNP efforts to push Transport Scotland's Electric Vehicle Loan initiative, only 214 loan applications have been made in the last year.

It means Scotland is well off course to encourage more electric cars in time for the SNP's petrol and diesel ban in 2032.

The country's four largest cities will have low emission trial zones by 2020, with the trials to start later this year in Glasgow.

But since the launch of the loan scheme – which hands out interest-free loans of up to £35,000 – there has only been limited interest from Scotland’s motorists.

And a drive to get black cab drivers on board has also failed, with just 166 Hackney applications in the past seven years.

The figures were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information.

Scottish Conservative shadow environment secretary Donald Cameron said:

“The SNP is completely out of step with its own policy here.

“It is miles away from being able to declare Scotland diesel and petrol free by 2032, which will in turn render low emission zone trials in Scotland’s main cities utterly worthless.

“The SNP has been completely irresponsible when it comes to this policy.

“Instead of working with the UK Government, the rest of Europe, and even the industry itself, it’s brought in its own fancy target just to be different.

“That may play well to the extreme green elements of the Yes movement, but it will infuriate ordinary drivers up and down the country.”

[Push for free finance textbooks in schools](#)

8 Apr 2018



A scheme to provide free textbooks to schools on personal finance would boost education and help the economy further down the line, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart wants to mirror a scheme in England which will see half a million books handed to schools there by September this year.

He said the initiative could be done in collaboration with business, and for limited Scottish Government funding would have a positive impact on youngsters.

It would also go some way to reversing the SNP administration’s reputation as an anti-business government, he added.

South of the border, money-saving expert Martin Lewis – in partnership with education charities – has pledged £200,000 to help children learn about savings, insurance and debt.

And while personal finance does feature in the Curriculum for Excellence, it is hoped such a resource could help youngsters prepare for the real world, and also consider a career in business from an early stage.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

“The nuts and bolts of education will always be the traditional subjects.

“But preparation for the real world is also essential, and that’s where this scheme could come into play.

“The wheels are already in motion south of the border, and we don’t want our youngsters to be left behind.

“It would not have to be overly expensive to provide these books, and could be done either in partnership with the business community or from Scottish Government funds.

“With more and more youngsters accessing information online, the cost of actually printing these books could be kept low too.

“It’s essential our young people learn about all aspects of personal finance.

“It will improve their own education, and might even help the wider economy further down the line with a generation of young people more knowledgeable about money and how to use it.”

[14 kids a week excluded for using weapons in school](#)

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- 14 kids a week excluded for using weapons in school

7 Apr 2018



Children are excluded from schools in Scotland more than 14 times a week for assaults involving weapons, a five-year high.

New figures have shown there were 428 instances of a pupil being excluded for a physical assault using weapons like knives last year, and a further 311

incidents involving improvised weapons.

That total of 739 is higher than the 661 incidents two years previously, and the 710 reports in 2013.

The statistics, published recently by the Scottish Government, are only gathered every two years.

They show a further 336 children were excluded for threats of using a weapon, as well as 1734 for fighting and 361 for substance misuse.

Theft (89), fire raising (190) and even indecent exposure (14) also featured on the list.

Overall, the number of exclusions has declined in recent years.

The 18,377 cases last year – the overwhelming majority of which were temporary – is half the rate of a decade ago.

Scottish Conservative early years spokeswoman Michelle Ballantyne said:

“While it’s generally welcome to see a reduction in the number of exclusions in recent years, the individual reasons are alarming.

“Parents will be horrified that two pupils a day are excluded for violent incidents involving a weapon – either conventional or improvised.

“That shows a problem with discipline remains within our schools, and that teachers need more support in dealing with it for the sake of their own safety and that of other pupils.

“If children aren’t shown now that the use of weapons, and other examples of violence, won’t be tolerated, the chances are they’ll continue doing it into adulthood.

“These figures are a cause of concern not just for schools, but for society more generally.”