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Nicola Sturgeon must drop her threat of a second independence referendum – or explain how she'd plug the £13 billion black hole which was revealed today as the starting cost for a separate country.

According to Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) figures, which set out the annual state of the country's finances, the current net fiscal deficit is £13.4 billion.

In addition, the level of higher public spending in Scotland compared to the UK average soared to a record difference of £1576 per head.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said it was time for the First Minister to set out a clear plan on how she would find the billions of pounds required to fill Scotland's economic black hole should it break away from Britain.

If she can't, he added, then the threat of a referendum re-run must be removed for good.

Today's report showed a slight improvement in Scotland's finances, with revenue increasing and the deficit falling, largely thanks to a small recovery in North Sea oil.

However, the finances of the rest of the UK are improving at a superior rate, meaning the gap between the two is widening.

As such, Scotland now raises eight per cent of UK total revenue, while receiving 9.3 per cent of spending.

Total spending per person in Scotland for 2017/18 was £1576 per head higher than the rest of the UK, compared to £1448 per head the previous year.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"If Nicola Sturgeon wants to continue her threat of second referendum, she has to come out and explain where she would find £13 billion to fill this deficit.

"Assuming that can't be done, the prospect of another divisive and unwelcome vote must be removed for good so Scotland can focus on what really matters.

“Yet again, the union dividend has been made clear.

“By being part of the UK, Scotland received an extra £1576 for every man, woman and child last year above the UK average. For a family of four, that’s more than £6000 in additional public spending.

“If Scotland was to be ripped out the UK, this spending would be slashed drastically, meaning schools, hospitals and infrastructure would be hit.

“Any Scottish Government would also have to massively increase taxes and borrowing to help make up the difference, something the hardworking public simply wouldn’t accept.

“And while Scotland’s finances improved slightly on the whole last year, the rest of the UK’s have done even better, meaning the gap is now bigger.

“The SNP, which has had control of Scotland’s economy for more than a decade, has to take responsibility for that under-performance.

“It can’t blame Brexit and it can’t blame the UK Government – it is all on the shoulders of a nationalist government which has obsessed with the idea of independence above everything else.”