

SNP not ready to deliver next wave of benefit powers

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The SNP government is unprepared for the next wave of social security powers, an official report has found.

Audit Scotland said the nationalists were finding it “harder than expected” to come good on new welfare controls, and have even spent £7.3 million this year handing powers back to the UK Government.

Ministers are spending almost as much on temporary and contractor staff than they are on permanent workers, the report added.

And despite only being operational since September, Social Security Scotland’s performance “has been affected by a lack of staff continuity”.

In the ‘Social Security: Implementing the devolved powers’ report, auditors stated: “The Scottish Government found delivery on its initial commitments harder than expected,” adding that the current systems in place “will not be enough to support the delivery of the second wave” of powers.

They added: “The Scottish Government does not have a clear understanding of the key things needed to deliver all remaining benefits in the way it intends.”

The SNP has already been under fire for handing devolved powers back to Westminster, despite demanding that and more in the years running up to the Scotland Act.

Scottish Conservative shadow social security secretary Michelle Ballantyne said:

“The SNP has spent years complaining about the UK Government’s approach to benefits.

“But now the nationalists have the power, they’re finding out just how difficult it is to create a fair and sustainable welfare system.

“This report shows that 98 per cent of the annual expenditure on devolved benefits have yet to be delivered.

“They have spent a fortune just to get to this point, and the costs appear to be rising still.

“The report makes clear that the financial management by the SNP of this programme is weak, and there has been a failure to regularly estimate and

report the long-term implementation costs.

“The SNP government is even paying the DWP to administer the very powers it shouted so loudly for in years past.

“We have a situation now where almost as much is being spent on agency and contractor staff than permanent workers, and that will only make delivery of these powers harder.

“Like everything else, the SNP jumped up and down in advance of getting these controls, yet is found to be completely incompetent when they arrive.

“If the nationalists can’t even sort out how to administer some benefits, how on earth do they propose to run an independent country?”