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Nicola Sturgeon is being challenged to admit that separation from the UK would mean “austerity max” for Scotland – following the publication of a new report today on the cost of her independence blueprint.

The report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies concludes that the SNP’s plans would lead to serious cuts to public spending for as long as 18 years after independence.

The report says it is “inconsistent” to claim that the SNP’s plans “do not amount to austerity but the UK Government’s current policy does”.

Yet, following the publication of her “Growth Commission,” Nicola Sturgeon has refused to admit that her plans would reduce spending on schools and the NHS.

The Scottish Conservatives are therefore calling on Nicola Sturgeon today to admit the obvious – that independence comes at a huge cost.

The report makes clear that extra cuts would be required under independence – but that the SNP Commission “does not say where the axe would fall”.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Nicola Sturgeon wants us to believe that independence would come cost-free. Yet this impartial expert report makes clear it would be austerity max for as long as 18 years. That is the staggering price the Nationalists are prepared to pay for their obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom.”

“Nicola Sturgeon needs to come clean. She should simply admit it: independence comes at a huge cost. Until she does, nobody should believe a word she says.”

“This report only underlines why it is so important that we oppose a second referendum on independence. We don’t want to go back to yet more insecurity and turmoil – Scotland needs to go forward to a more secure, prosperous future as part of the UK.”