

Sturgeon knew citizen's income plans would cost £12.3bn before launching pilot

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Nicola Sturgeon pressed ahead with plans to trial a basic income for everyone – despite civil servant briefings showing her it would cost taxpayers £12.3 billion a year.

Documents obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information have revealed the briefing on Citizen's Basic Income (CBI) handed to the First Minister in March.

It warned the plans would cost billions extra every year, and lead to every income tax payer in the country having to cough up a rate of 50 per cent.

The briefing stated: "It is a very costly policy that is unlikely to gain public acceptability and ultimately may not have the desired transformative effect."

The document was given to Nicola Sturgeon, finance secretary Derek Mackay, social security secretary Angela Constance and minister Jeane Freeman on March 2 by Liz Hawkins, the Scottish Government's housing and social justice director.

It warned CBI would "have little incentivising impact" and that "most governments will not be able to afford both CBI and a generous welfare state".

Experts also said it was "more likely to further entrench gender stereotyping".

Despite this, last month Nicola Sturgeon spoke of her fondness for the approach while unveiling her Programme for Government.

She told MSPs: "It is an idea that merits deeper consideration. I can therefore confirm that the Scottish Government will work with interested local authorities to fund research into the concept and feasibility of a citizen's basic income."

This was reinforced as part of her keynote SNP conference speech earlier this

month, where she said: "Last year, this conference asked us to investigate the feasibility of a citizen's basic income. So we've announced the funding to do just that."

Scottish Conservative shadow social security secretary Adam Tomkins said:

"Nicola Sturgeon and her finance team were told in no uncertain terms that a scheme for citizen's basic income would be utterly unaffordable and not remotely sustainable.

"Despite these stark warnings, she continued to create an impression that she was going to introduce it.

"This suggests she is pandering to the extreme left of the Yes movement in the hope they won't turn on her over poor polling and the fact separation is dead in the water.

"But this briefing makes plain just how unworkable the CBI approach would be.

"Instead of playing to the gallery, the First Minister should explain exactly where she's going to find the extra £12.3 billion that would be required each year to fund it.

"Or perhaps she'd like to tell taxpayers, including those on low incomes, that they'll have to give back half their pay packet to bankroll this vanity project.

"At the start of the year I was able to look into the feasibility of CBI and quickly conclude it would be damaging and impossible.

"It shouldn't be beyond the wit of the SNP government to do the same."