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- Business start-ups receiving support sink to 8-year low

3 Jan 2018



The number of start-up firms receiving support from the Scottish Government's Business Gateway scheme has dropped to an eight-year low.

New figures have revealed that 8746 new businesses received help from the organisation last year, a 15 per cent drop from 2009.

The total sums invested also fell to their lowest, with the £12.6 million spent in 2016/17 around £1 million less than eight years ago.

Business Gateway describes itself as “publicly funded service contributing to the economic well-being of Scotland by providing access to free business support services”.

Statistics obtained by the Scottish Conservatives also revealed the birth and date rate of businesses north of the border is worse than the UK average.

According to ONS figures, Scotland's business birth rate of 12.5 per cent is worse than every English region, and only marginally better than Wales and Northern Ireland.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the data exposed the SNP's anti-business agenda, warning the overall situation could get worse still after it hiked income tax in the budget.

Derek Mackay, the finance secretary, made that decision against the advice of a range of business organisations, who said it would damage the economy and place firms here at a competitive disadvantage.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Business Gateway provides essential support to many start-up businesses right across the country.

“These are the firms we hope will create jobs, boost growth and create a stronger economy overall for Scotland.

“So it's extremely concerning to learn fewer have been using the free support of Business Gateway, and it's yet another indication of the cost of having an anti-business SNP government.

“If you take these findings along with the fact more Scottish businesses are dying, while fewer are being created, it paints a grim picture.

“But instead of seeking to improve this situation in the budget, Derek Mackay went against the wishes of the business community, and hiked taxes for hundreds of thousands of Scots.”

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- Soaring number of dementia prescriptions illustrates ‘crisis’

30 Dec 2017



Thousands more dementia drugs were given to patients last year as Scotland’s NHS faces the consequences of an ageing population.

More than 263,000 drugs were prescribed last year, an increase of 5.4 per cent from 2015/16.

Compared with two years ago, doctors now give out 70 more dementia drugs a day as growing numbers are diagnosed with the illness.

And in the space of seven years, the total number of patients receiving drugs for dementia has almost doubled from 135,840 in 2010/11 to 263,444 last year.

The figures were published by ISD Scotland.

It’s the latest set of statistics illustrating the challenges faced by the NHS in relation to an ageing population.

It’s estimated there will be nearly 20,000 newly diagnosed cases of dementia a year by 2020, while health experts have said hospitals are being overwhelmed with patients who are being treated for physical ailments, but also suffer from conditions like Alzheimer’s.

Despite the increase in prescriptions, the cost burden on the NHS has reduced.

Last year, the average cost per item decreased to £14.38, compared to £21.57 two years ago.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“It’s of course welcome that so many people are living longer.

“But it would be foolish to ignore the challenges that brings for the NHS, and we can see from these figures more and more people are being treated for dementia.

“The Scottish Government will have seen this coming down the track for many years now, so there’s no excuse for it not to be ready.

“This rise will also pose huge challenges for hospitals who treat these patients when they succumb to other ailments.

“Having been in charge of health and social care for more than a decade, we need to start seeing signs that the SNP has a plan for this impending crisis.”

[Hundreds of hospital beds lost in past year](#)

29 Dec 2017



Hundreds of hospital beds have been cut in Scotland’s NHS over the past year, it has been revealed.

Official figures have shown there was a reduction of 622 beds in 2016/17, a decrease of 2.8 per cent.

This is despite growing demands on the health service and higher inpatient activity than there was five years ago.

And the 21,340 beds available to Scotland’s NHS last year is a 7.3 per cent reduction from the 23,012 in 2012/13.

The statistics were included in an ISD Scotland report on health service costs.

They showed that some health boards were worse hit than others.

For example, in NHS Grampian over the past five years, the reduction of 2358 beds to 1959 is a drop of 17 per cent.

Last year there were 1.15 million inpatient cases across Scotland, excluding long-term stays.

And while that’s a slight decrease on the previous year of 1.16 million, it

compares to just 1.07 million five years ago.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“There is a general shift towards community care, which will explain some of the reductions we’ve seen over the past years.

“But at the same time, we have an expanding and an ageing population, and we’re going to need hospital beds to support and care for more patients who have increasingly complex needs.

“The NHS is under severe financial pressure, but having access to a hospital bed must remain one of its fundamental principles.

“We’ve all heard the horror stories about people being kept waiting on trolleys in accident and emergency, and massive delays for various types of care.

“When these things happen against a backdrop of dwindling bed numbers, it’s easy to see where at least some of that problem lies.

“The Scottish Government must get on top of this situation and make sure, when beds are taken out of action, it is for the right reason, and no patient will suffer as a consequence.

“Increasingly it seems that SNP ministers’ planning around hospital bed numbers has limited flexibility and that their usage modelling is not matching what is required in reality.”

[Police spent tens of thousands keeping details secret](#)

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- Police spent tens of thousands keeping details secret

28 Dec 2017



Police Scotland has spent tens of thousands of pounds in the last three years on legal costs to prevent information being released to the public, it has emerged.

Since 2015/16, the organisation – which the SNP created with the aim of being more transparent and accountable – spent £77,493 on challenging Freedom of Information requests.

The costs include a £63,000 bill for challenging Scotland's Information Commissioner on the release of details involving Covert Human Intelligence Sources.

That case was eventually lost, meaning police had to cover the judicial expenses of the commissioner.

In addition, £11,634 was spent resisting a call from the information commissioner who'd ordered police to hand over CCTV in relation to a criminal case.

And an appeal against the commissioner on facts surrounding a death cost the single force £2772.

Shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said, considering Police Scotland continually claimed it was strapped for cash, the spending on legal fees was "excessive".

It's the latest example of the single force being criticised on its levels of transparency.

At the beginning of December, Audit Scotland rebuked the organisation for failing to properly declare payments made to senior staff by the Scottish Police Authority.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

"These revelations are particularly embarrassing for an organisation which is supposed to be leading the way in transparency and accountability.

"People will think that Police Scotland should respect the rulings of Scotland's Information Commissioner, not spend tens of thousands fighting them in court.

"This is all money which could have been invested in the frontline and supporting hardworking officers.

"Instead, it's been squandered on legal fees.

"With this level of waste, it's no wonder Police Scotland finds it difficult to make ends meet."

[Revealed: the £627m cost of council golden goodbyes](#)

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- Revealed: the £627m cost of council golden goodbyes

27 Dec 2017



Local authorities across Scotland have spent more than £627 million on exit packages for staff in the last six years, it has emerged.

Figures have shown more than 15,000 severance deals have been struck by councils for outgoing staff since 2011/12.

Over that time, the average package paid was £40,000.

The figures were published by Audit Scotland as part of a wider report into local government finances last month.

Last year alone, six severance deals a day were agreed by Scotland's 32 councils, at a cost of £78 million.

The Scottish Conservatives said local authorities, all of whom are under immense financial pressure, should tighten their procedures when it comes to golden goodbyes.

The same report by Audit Scotland stated that councils have £14.5 billion of debt, and some will have eaten through all their financial reserves within a couple years.

It added that £79 million in reserves was used last year for general running costs, and that 10 per cent of local authority budgets are spent servicing debt.

Scottish Conservative local government spokesman Alexander Stewart said:

"People will be horrified that hundreds of millions of pounds have been used in this way.

"Everyone understands the need for councils to become more efficient, and reducing the headcount in certain departments may be a way of doing that.

"But the average payout is £40,000, which means some senior staff will have been getting golden goodbyes to make the eyes water.

"In some cases contracts signed long ago may have dictated an overly-generous payment, but this is something local authorities need to clamp down on.

"There's no point trying to make efficiency savings in one area while millions are being needlessly wasted in another.

"It's no wonder some councils are burning through their cash reserves just to keep their head above water when this massive spend is considered."