

Scottish Government must close business rates loophole

14 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have demanded that the Scottish Government closes a loophole to ensure that certain small businesses receive financial support in circumstances where they pay rates in their rent but are not the 'named' ratepayer.

This loophole currently affects a number of businesses in shared premises who are equally affected by the current economic lockdown but are usually tenants and thus not eligible for support as the named business ratepayer – for example, units in covered markets.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary raised the issue with Kate Forbes, Scottish Finance Secretary today in the Scottish Parliament, asked that that this loophole is closed and that these Scottish businesses are not forgotten.

Bespoke Canvas Art & Interiors Ltd is one of the 100 businesses who currently trade within the Forge Market in Glasgow and pay a single unit cost each month which includes their business rates.

Glasgow City Council has refused the shop's application for the Business Support Grant Scheme on the grounds that they are not the ratepayer, despite proof that they pay their business rates as part of their rent.

In exactly the same way as all other businesses, without assistance from the Business Support Scheme, many of the small businesses within the market will find it difficult to continue trading without any income.

Lastly, the UK Government has already taken steps to fix exactly this oversight in the rest of the UK. On the 2nd May the UK Government announced the 'Top-up to local business grant fund scheme' in England which has accommodated certain small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funds scheme and allows for the allocation of funding to be at the discretion of local authorities.

The Scottish Conservatives are advocating that the Scottish Government follows this approach and supports all Scottish businesses in the same way.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary said;

"This is an utterly nonsensical position and is causing many small businesses extreme hardship.

"Many businesses are suffering at the moment because of public health

restrictions necessary to keep us all safe – and will need financial support.

“This is just the latest hole in the Scottish Government’s patchy and insufficient support package for the Scottish economy.

“The SNP have already u-turned on support for businesses with multiple premises, they must now close this loophole immediately and give businesses who indirectly pay rates proper support.”

SNP care homes strategy branded an ‘abject failure’

13 May 2020



The SNP’s approach to testing for coronavirus in care homes has been an “abject failure”, the Scottish Conservatives said today.

At First Minister’s Questions, leader Jackson Carlaw said staff and vulnerable residents were still going untested despite SNP pledges to the contrary.

He raised the example of Highgate care home in Uddingston, where 22 residents have died.

It was reported that carers there are still waiting to be tested, and are fearful they are the ones who have brought the deadly infection into the facility.

Nicola Sturgeon confirmed another 415 Covid-19 deaths in care settings, which pushes the nationwide total to beyond 3000.

It shows again that care homes are now the most vulnerable places in the country to the virus.

Yet still the SNP government is failing to carry out enough tests to ensure it is not being brought into facilities.

Mr Carlaw pointed out that, at the start of this month, ministers promised all staff and residents would be tested wherever there is an outbreak.

But as the example of the North Lanarkshire facility shows, this has not been happening.

And when asked if she accepted this was a failing, she responded: “No I don’t.”

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"We know that Scotland is lagging behind badly other parts of the UK when it comes to carrying out coronavirus tests.

"And as new statistics again showed, care homes are where the most people are losing their lives to this virus.

"In other words, fewer tests are being carried out in the very places we need them most.

"It's clear nothing like enough focus has gone on testing in care homes, and that has been a very costly mistake.

"When it comes to this strand of the fight against coronavirus, by any standards, the SNP government's strategy has been an abject failure.

"And the First Minister's refusal to accept that her approach to testing in care homes has been inadequate is nothing short of staggering."

Scottish Government must explain increasing 'R' number

12 May 2020



Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow Constitution Secretary has asked the Scottish Government to explain the increasing R number relating to the reinfection rate of Covid-19.

Speaking in the Scottish Parliamentary debate on 'Suppressing COVID: Next Phase' this afternoon Mr Fraser outlined that two weeks ago the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, stated that the R number was 0.7, while just last night he stated it was 0.8.

The Scottish Conservative shadow constitution Secretary has therefore asked the Scottish Government to explain this increasing reinfection rate.

And Mr Fraser said it is science that will guide the ongoing decisions of the Scottish Government so a "detailed and accurate understanding" of what that science says is vital.

During his speech the Scottish Conservative shadow constitution secretary highlighted the human and economic cost to continuing the lockdown.

He also outlined concerns that while the lockdown has, so far, been 'self-

policing' this is likely to change, especially as frustration builds and the number of daily fatalities decline. The Scottish Government must therefore prepare to share the scientific underpinning for their choices, in particular the R number.

Given that all nations are now in the process of easing lockdown, it is more important than ever that citizens understand the reasons for the differing decisions at differing times, and the all-important R number behind them.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow constitution secretary said;

"There is a human and economic cost to continuing lockdown that we must understand.

"1100 Scottish people have died over and above the regular death rate from non-Covid causes since the lockdown began – in many cases they may be avoidable deaths.

"The Scottish Government has stated that the R number in Scotland is higher than the rest of the UK.

"John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister told the Covid-19 Committee 2 weeks ago that the R number was estimated at 0.7. Last night, he said on the BBC, it was 0.8.

"If that is correct, and it is going up, we need to know why that is.

"If the Scottish Government is using a different R number in Scotland compared to England as a justification for greater restrictions, then that information must be shared with the public.

"The long term consequences of extending lockdown any longer than is absolutely necessary could be horrendous. For that reason we need full transparency for the choices that have been made."

[Scottish Government failed to 'Test, Trace and Isolate'](#)

12 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have accused the Scottish Government of a 'basic failure in Test, Trace and Isolate' regarding an outbreak of Covid-19 in Scotland in February.

The Covid-19 outbreak took place at a conference staged by sportswear firm

Nike on the 27th February and was only revealed last night in a BBC Disclosure documentary.

Both the First Minister and the Health Secretary have been challenged today as to why the outbreak was kept secret and why proper infection control was not followed.

The First Minister has defended the decision on the grounds of patient confidentiality.

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary said;

“It is deeply shocking that the First Minister made the decision to cover up these Covid cases in Scotland despite promises to be open and honest at the start of the outbreak.

“There was no need to publish any patient details of this outbreak so the First Minister’s defence simply isn’t good enough.

“SNP Ministers reported outbreaks in Tayside & Ayrshire then why not in Lothian?

“This was a basic failure in Test, Trace, Isolate right at the beginning of this crisis.

“Who knows what kind of impact this failure has had on the trajectory of this crisis.”

[Scottish Conservatives call to restart cancer services](#)

12 May 2020



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for the Scottish Government to publish an NHS Scotland Recovery Plan to restart services disrupted by Covid-19, particularly cancer services.

In preparation for the Covid crisis NHS Scotland went to great lengths to free up capacity and many services were paused.

Elective surgeries were postponed for three months to free up beds and cancer screening programmes for breast, cervical and bowel cancer as well as some cancer operations were also indefinitely halted.

Now cancer charities have issued a plea to the Scottish government to get

cancer services up and running again and the Scottish Conservatives have asked for a plan to deal with the backlog in treatment and operations.

In NHS England cancer treatments restarted over two weeks ago.

In addition, this morning ISD Scotland published figures showing that attendances at A&E services have dropped dramatically since the end of March, due to the measures put in place to respond to COVID-19.

The statistics highlight that during the week of the 3 May only 16,107 people were seen at A&E, compared to 27,845 for the same week in 2019, the previous year, a staggering drop of over 40%.

Miles Briggs, Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary said;

“It is vital that the Scottish Government brings forward an NHS Recovery Plan – a plan to restart our health service, particularly cancer services and operations, in Scotland.

“Over the last two months, in so many ways, people have selflessly put their own needs on hold.

“The A&E figures show that people have been staying away from the NHS meaning many people may be suffering in silence.

“But further delays will mean more patients could have poorer outcomes.

“It is now over two weeks since NHS England restarted cancer treatments, we could too.

“Thanks to the incredible work from everyone who works in our NHS, our health service has not been overwhelmed during this crisis.

“The Scottish Government must publish a plan to deal with the current backlog of operations and treatments and give everyone access to the healthcare they need before it’s too late.”