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- Convergence funds a 'massive' victory for the Scottish Conservatives

4 Sep 2019



The Scottish Conservatives have welcomed the £160 million of convergence funding for Scottish farmers that has been announced in the UK Spending Review today.

The funds have been the subject of a lengthy and concerted campaign from the Scottish Conservatives at Westminster to ensure that Scottish farmers received the money they were due.

The EU Multi Annual Financial Framework set out the aim of redistributing CAP payments more equitably across the EU based on average €/hectare. Under the framework, all countries receiving less than 90% of the EU average would receive a funding uplift.

As the Member State, the UK only qualified for an uplift because of Scotland, whose per hectare rate is only 45% of the EU average. England, Wales and Northern Ireland are all above the 90% qualifying threshold.

Peter Chapman, Scottish Conservative Shadow Rural Economy Secretary said:

“This is a massive victory for the Scottish Conservative campaign to get convergence funds to Scottish farmers.

“Once again this is evidence of Scottish Conservatives working with the UK Government to deliver for Scotland while the SNP complain from the sidelines.

“Months of patient lobbying have paid off, and hard working farmers will benefit to the tune of £160m.

“This money must now go directly to farmers, which, for some, will make a crucial difference to their future viability.”

David Mundell, Scottish Conservative MP for Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale said:

“These extra funds for Scottish farmers just show how Scottish Conservatives are making a difference at Westminster.

“We demanded a review, it recommended that Scottish farmers received the

convergence funding and now that is being carried out.

“That is the Scottish Conservatives delivering for Scotland.”

Scotland needs city mayors to boost autonomy for councils

4 Sep 2019



Directly-elected mayors or provosts for Scotland’s seven cities would boost growth and improve local decision-making, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Making a keynote speech this morning, shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the Scottish Government should follow England’s lead in creating the elected positions.

He told the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation that “at the very least” Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth, Inverness and Stirling should be given the opportunity to appoint mayoral representatives.

The changes south of the border have been a success, he added, and Scotland failing to follow suit was a “substantial weakness”.

Local mayors could have powers over economic development, health spending and possibly even welfare, he added.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“We would like to see, at the very least, our seven cities in Scotland having elected mayors, or provosts, with a similar executive power to those south of the border.

“This would give the opportunity to devolve more power from the centre.

“The SNP is very keen on devolution from Westminster to Edinburgh, but not at all keen on devolution from Edinburgh any further afield.

“This situation needs to be reversed, with much greater autonomy for local areas.

“It would be a fundamental shift from our current structure of local government, and would allow council finance to be put in its proper context.

“We can see a Scotland made up of a patchwork of vibrant city regions, larger

rural areas, all with well-known local leaders – all being a counterweight to an over-centralised Holyrood administration.”

Sturgeon bids to use government programme to force indyref2

3 Sep 2019



Nicola Sturgeon has used her programme for government to try and force through a second referendum on independence.

The First Minister confirmed today that she will seek the “transfer of power” from Westminster so the SNP can officially call the vote.

Ministers have even admitted they will overhaul the discredited 2014 White Paper on separation to ramp up their bid to break up Britain.

Ms Sturgeon told MSPs: “I can confirm today that, during the passage of the bill, we will seek agreement to the transfer of power that will put the referendum beyond legal challenge.”

And the nationalist government confirmed in its small print published today: “The Scottish Government produced a comprehensive plan for an independent Scotland in 2014. The government will now undertake the necessary work to update that plan and ensure that people have the information they need to make informed choices over the future of the country.”

At the centre of the original White Paper were plans for Scotland’s oil industry to financially sustain a separate state, bringing in revenues of up to £10 billion a year.

But today, the First Minister said her government’s support for the oil and gas industry was now only “conditional”.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“It’s typical of the First Minister that her statement both began and ended with independence.

“It really is the be-all-and-end-all for her nationalist government.

“Not only did she confirm her plan to push ahead with an unnecessary and unwanted referendum bill.

“But we also learned the utterly discredited White Paper from 2014 is finally

set to be binned.

“Perhaps, because she discards it altogether, she should apologise to the people of Scotland for the deceit contained within it.

“The people of Scotland have had enough of this. They simply want Nicola Sturgeon to give it a rest.”

[30 key promises broken by the SNP](#)

3 Sep 2019



Below is a list of failed SNP pledges from previous programmes for government:

Education

1. Failing to close the attainment gap

PfG promise: “At its centre is a commitment to introduce an Improvement Framework for schools, to help us drive up attainment in all schools, and to close the attainment gap” (Programme for Government, 2015-16, [link](#)).

Reality: The attainment gap between 18 year olds going to university in Scotland has increased to the highest level since at least 2010, when UCAS figures began. The gap is now 27.2 per cent, an increase of 0.7 per cent on the last year (*UCAS*, 7 August 2019, [link](#))

2. Childcare expansion situation is ‘grim’

PfG promise: Expand free, high quality early learning and childcare for 3 and 4 year olds and new cohorts of 2-year old children with plans to increase the entitlement to 1140 hours a year by 2020 (Programme for Government, 2015-16, [link](#)).

Reality: with one year to go for the SNP to deliver their childcare pledge, nurseries say the situation is ‘grim’ and finding staff is a huge problem. In a survey by the National Day Nurseries Association, 71 per cent of private childcare providers had recruitment issues. 62 per cent of nurseries faced ‘significant challenges’ in retaining staff. Purnima Tanuku, the NDNA chief executive, said: ‘The results of our research paint a grim picture, with 71 per cent of employers telling us they have problems recruiting staff at practitioner level’ (*BBC News*, 7 August 2019, [link](#)).

3. Education Bill dropped

PfG promise: “introducing an Education Bill to reform school governance – giving more powers to headteachers, more support to teachers and strengthening the role of parents” (Programme for Government, 2017-18, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP abandoned their Education Bill despite calling it their flagship reform. Sturgeon originally said that ‘A new education bill will deliver the biggest and most radical change to how our schools are run that we have seen in the lifetime of devolution’ (Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 5 September 2017, [link](#)).

Economy

4. The Scottish Growth Scheme is failing to deliver £500 million anywhere near on time

PfG Promise: ‘We will work with business organisations, the UK Government and the Scottish Parliament to establish a new £500 million Scottish Growth Scheme.’ (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2016-17*, page 6, [link](#)).

Reality: The Scottish Growth Scheme didn’t release funds to businesses for more than a year. Scottish Conservative FOIs found that the 2017-18 and 2018-19 Budgets only allocated £25 million to the supposedly £500 million Scottish Growth Scheme. A year on from the announcement of the Scottish Growth Scheme, £0 of loans and guarantees were delivered to businesses, whereas it was supposed to be a £500 million as part of a three-year plan (*The Times*, 11 March 2018, [link](#)).

5. The SNP dropped their commitment to cutting APD

PfG Promise: ‘Reduce the burden of Air Passenger Duty (APD) by 50 per cent with the reduction beginning when we introduce a Scottish APD in 2018’ (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2015-16*, Page 6, [link](#))

Reality: The ADT (Scotland) Act 2017 received Royal Assent on 25 July 2017, however the tax has yet to be fully devolved to Scotland as a result of legal issues surrounding flights to and from the Highlands and Islands. In May 2019, the SNP announced that they would drop their commitment to halving APD as a result of Nicola Sturgeon declaring a climate emergency at the SNP conference. (*BBC News*, 7 May 2019, [link](#))

6. The SNP delayed their Digital Growth Fund

PfG Promise: ‘That is why this year, building on previous investments in digital skills, we announced the Digital Growth Fund, with £36 million available over three years from April 2018 to enhance the digital capabilities of our people and our businesses, through support for digital skills training. We will work with business to ensure this investment meets their needs.’ (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2016-17*, page 53, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP only started partially releasing some of this money in late

June 2018, more than 15 months after it was announced (*SNP.org*, 18 March 2017, [link](#); *Scottish Parliament*, Written Answers, 7 June 2018, [link](#)).

Welfare

7. SNP's Social Security agency is falling short of recruitment targets

PfG target: "Confirming the configuration of the new social security agency and continuing to recruit at least 1,500 members of staff to work as part of it" (*Programme for Government*, 2017-18, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP are falling short of their recruitment needs to run a successful and functioning Social Security agency. In the last Audit Scotland report there were only 320 staff employed by Social Security Scotland agency. They point to a larger figure of 463 that are employed to help with the delivery of the devolved benefits (p.19 of report), but that is a wider scope including policy staff/comms/programme staff. They've used a lot of contractors through the process as well, and the report points to, a position vacancy rate of 30% – which the SNP, following the audit release, claimed was down to 15% and dropping (Audit Scotland, *Social Security: Implementing the Devolved Powers*, May 2019, [link](#)), .

8. SNP have delayed their delivery of Funeral Expense benefit

PfG target: "In the coming year we will also provide financial support to people on lower incomes who have lost loved ones and are struggling with funeral costs through Funeral Expense Assistance" (*Programme for Government*, 2018-19, [link](#)).

Reality: The benefit was to be delivered by summer this year, still no announcements have been made that launch this benefit (Scot Gov, *Delivery of Devolved Benefits: Stakeholder Toolkit*, [link](#)).

9. The SNP have handed back powers for one of the devolved benefits

PfG: "deliver 11 existing social security benefits as part of a devolved Scottish system" (*Programme for Government*, 2017-18, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP decided to leave the administration of the Severe Disablement Payment in the hands of the DWP (*The Scotsman*, 6 March 2019, [link](#)).

Local Government

10. The SNP have still not introduced a Local Democracy Bill

PfG: "The findings from the Review will be used to put in place new governance arrangements, and where legislation is needed we will deliver these through a Local Democracy Bill" (*Programme for Government*, 2018-19, [link](#)).

Reality: They have still not introduced a Bill of this nature despite having

undertaken a Local Governance Review. However, the 2017-18 PfG points to the Bill being introduced at some point over the lifetime of this Parliament so it could still be delivered.

Transport

11. The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route opened almost a year late

PfG promise: 'The contract award date and construction start are anticipated later this year, with work scheduled for completion by spring 2018.'
(*Programme for Government*, 2014-15, [link](#)).

Reality: The AWPR did not open to drivers until February 2019. (*Press and Journal*, 18 February 2019, [link](#)).

12. Glasgow to Edinburgh mainline electrification was completed ten months late

PfG promise: 'Work continues on the Edinburgh-Glasgow Improvement Programme, with electrification of the mainline due for completion by December 2016.'
(*Programme for Government*, 2015-16, [link](#)).

Reality: The schedule was revised to October 2017. (*Transport Scotland*, accessed 26 August 2019, [link](#)).

13. Completion of the Queensferry Crossing took years longer than promised

PfG promise: 'The Queensferry Crossing is the biggest transport infrastructure project in Scotland for a generation. It is being built on time and under budget, with completion due by the end of 2016.'
(*Programme for Government*, 2014-15, [link](#)).

Reality: The bridge did not open until 2017, and in April this year, it was reported that 'snagging' work was planned to continue on the bridge until October: over 18 months after opening (*Scotsman*, 20 April 2019, [link](#)).

Culture

14. After three years, the National Culture Strategy has not been completed

PfG promise: We will commence work on a National Culture Strategy which will be based on the principles of access, equality and excellence. (*Programme for Government*, 2016-17, [link](#)).

Reality: The most recent development is the publication of a draft cultural strategy in June 2018. The Scottish Government only now commits to publish a final strategy in 2019. (*gov.scot*, accessed 26 August 2019, [link](#)).

15. A cultural youth experience fund has been promised three times but is nowhere to be found

PfG promise: 'During the next year we will begin preparatory work with

partners for establishing a Youth Experience Fund, so that all primary schools have the opportunity to visit Scotland's theatres, museums, galleries and historic estates.' (*Programme for Government, 2017-18*, [link](#)).

Reality: This was re-promised in the 2017 Programme for Government as part of 2018's 'Year of Young People'. It was promised again in the 2018 Programme for Government with a commitment to fund projects in 2019. No announcement of the fund has since been made. (*Programme for Government, 2017-18*, [link](#); *Programme for Government, 2018-19*, [link](#)).

Justice

16. The SNP have failed to tackle drug driving for two years

PfG promise: 'this year, we will...create a new criminal offence of drug driving' (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2017-18*, page 15, [link](#)).

Reality: The legislation was eventually laid in January 2019 – but won't come into force until October. The SSI was published on 15 January 2019, and will come into force in October 2019. This is over two years after it was first promised. (Justice Committee, *Report on the Drug Driving (Specified Limits) (Scotland) Regulations 2019*, February 2019, [link](#)).

17. The SNP failed to start work to widen the use of victim impact statements in court

PfG promise: 'we will...widen the range of serious crimes where the victim can make a statement to the court about how the crime has affected them physically, emotionally and financially, consulting on specific details by early 2019.' (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2018-19*, page 16, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP launched the consultation in September 2019, with two days to go until this year's Programme for Government. (*Scottish Government*, 1 September 2019, [link](#)).

18. The SNP have failed to deliver a key aspect of Michelle's Law – improving victims' rights before prison release

PfG promise: 'we will...ensure victims and their families have better information and greater support ahead of prison release arrangements.' (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2018-19*, page 16, [link](#)).

Reality: The latest work plan for the Victims' Taskforce shows that work was still 'ongoing' as of June 2019. There is no evidence that victims and/or their families have had greater say ahead of Temporary Release. (Scottish Government, *Victims Taskforce – Work Plan*, 12 June 2019, [link](#)).

19. The SNP failed to move forward with new domestic abuse protective orders

PfG Promise: 'We will consult in the autumn on further protections for those

at risk of domestic abuse through new protective orders' (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2018-19*, page 17, [link](#)).

Reality: The consultation wasn't launched until December 2018. (*Scottish Government*, 21 December 2018, [link](#)).

20. The SNP have failed to introduce the family law Bill they promised

PfG promise: 'Bills for introduction in 2018-19...Family Law Bill'. (Scottish Government, *Programme for Government 2018-19*, page 25, [link](#)).

Reality: No such Bill has been introduced. (Scottish Parliament, *Current Bills*, [link](#)).

21. The SNP have failed to introduce Finn's Law or increase sentences for the worst types of animal cruelty

PfG promise: introduce increased sentences for the worst types of animal cruelty, including attacks on police dogs, an initiative known as 'Finn's Law' (*Programme for Government, 2018 – 2019*, [link](#)).

Reality: SNP have only consulted on increasing sentences. The consultation closed in April 2019. (Scottish Government, [link](#)).

Health

22. An SNP run council has scrapped funding for Frank's Law

PfG Promise: 'implement Frank's Law, which will see people of all age groups who need it be eligible for free personal care by April 2019' (*Program for Government, 2018-19*, [link](#)).

Reality: The South Ayrshire Joint Integration Board – which is in health secretary Jeane Freeman's home patch – had set aside £315,000 to pay for the initiative this year, but has now decided to rescind that. It is unclear if or how under 65s in the area who qualify will now be helped, although the council said existing resources could be called upon. Ms Kopel said she was 'disgusted, appalled and sickened' by the decision and questioned why the SNP had previously announced it 'in a blaze of glory' (*Daily Record*, 9 July 2019, [link](#)).

23. SNP's drive to recruit mental health workers is falling woefully short

PfG promise: 'As part of the implementation of Scotland's new Mental Health Strategy, we will provide additional investment over the next five years, rising to £35 million in the fifth year for 800 extra workers in key locations, including police and justice settings' (*Program for Government, 2017-18*, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP's commitment to hire an extra 800 mental health workers is falling woefully short and will miss the target unless changes are made. Research by the Scottish Conservatives has found just 106 additional psychiatric staff have been recruited as part of an SNP government drive

since it was announced two years ago. That's despite a pledge to bring in eight times that number by the end of 2021/22 (*Evening Express*, 27 March 2019, [link](#)).

Environment and Energy

24. SNP missing key recycling target by 12 years

PfG promise: "Recycle 70 per cent of all waste, with just 5 per cent sent to landfill, by 2025." (*Programme for Government*, 2012-13, [link](#)).

Reality: The SNP are on course to miss their own recycling target by 12 years. The SNP has committed to recycling 60 per cent of household rubbish by 2020. However, between 2011 and 2017, the percentage of recycled household waste has only risen from 40.1 per cent to 45.6 per cent. If annual increases continue in the same trend, it will take until 2032 to meet the target (*The Herald*, 11 November 2018, [link](#)).

25. The SNP's public energy company is behind schedule

PfG promise: Later this year we will consult on our preferred model for a publicly-owned not-for-profit energy company, to support our efforts to tackle fuel poverty.

Reality: Plans for the SNP's not-for-profit energy company are already months behind schedule. Paul Wheelhouse revealed that work on a strategic outline business case has only just started. He also outlined that plans to gauge public opinion, which were supposed to start in August 2018, will now not begin until this year (*The Sun*, 11 November 2018, [link](#); Scottish Parliament, *Question S5W-19519*, 7 November 2018, [link](#)).

26. SNP are on course to miss their renewable heat target

PfG promise: "the equivalent of 11 per cent of heat demand from renewables" (*Programme for Government*, 2012-13, [link](#)).

Reality: The Scottish Government are not on course to meet their heat target of 11 per cent from renewables. In 2017, only 5.9 per cent of heat demand was generated from renewables (*Scottish Government*, 2017, [link](#)).

27. Delivering Scotland's biodiversity strategy and meeting Aichi 2020 Targets

PfG promise: 'We remain committed to delivering Scotland's biodiversity strategy and striving to meet the 'Aichi' 2020 international targets.' (*Programme for Government*, 2018-19, [link](#)).

Reality: Only on course to meet 7 of the 20 targets (*Scottish Parliament*, 2 August 2019, [link](#)).

Rural Affairs

28. The SNP have reneged on their promise to introduce a Good Food Nation Bill

PfG promise: The SNP promised a Good Food Nation Bill in their manifesto, and again in both the 2016 and 2017 Programmes for Government. In January 2018, Fergus Ewing set out his commitment to the Bill in response to a question in the Chamber. (*SNP Manifesto 2016*, [link](#); *Programme for Government 2016 – 2017*, [link](#); *Programme for Government 2017 – 2018*, [link](#); *Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 25 January 2018, [link](#); *Programme for Government 2018 – 2019*, [link](#)).

Reality: The 2018 Programme for Government contained a watered-down version of the promise for legislation, setting out only a commitment to publish a Good Food Nation programme. A ‘programme of measures’ was published in September 2018 (*Scottish Government, Programme for Government 2018 – 2019*, [link](#); *Scottish Government, Good Food Nation: programme of measures*, 11 September 2018, [link](#)).

29. The SNP have failed to introduce fisheries legislation

PfG promise: “We will introduce a Bill during this Parliamentary session to underpin new management structures and establish the foundations for a more secure and sustainable future for wild fisheries.” (*Programme for Government, 2016 – 17*, [link](#)).

Reality: Not achieved yet but committed to this session. Will need to be introduced in 2019 PfG.

Connectivity

30. The SNP are on course to miss their own target to roll out super-fast broadband 30. The SNP are on course to miss their own target to roll out super-fast broadband

PfG promise: “driving forward the ‘Reaching 100%’ project to deliver access to superfast broadband to all residential and business premises by 2021” (*Programme for Government, 2017 – 18*, [link](#)); “...we will now award contracts for the first phase of our Reaching 100% programme.” (*Programme for Government, 2018-19*, [link](#)).

Reality: Paul Wheelhouse admitted it was ‘impossible’ to say when R100 would arrive. This announcement came shortly after the SNP revealed that the bidding process for the R100 programme will be delayed until the end of September 2019, with contract signature by the end of the year, leaving an impossibly short time for delivery. This latest example of SNP mismanagement risks leaving our remote and rural communities at a significant disadvantage (*The Herald*, 12 June 2019, [link](#); *The Herald*, 8 June 2019, [link](#); *Scottish Parliament, Question S5W-23670*, 7 June 2019, [link](#)).

SNP still ill-equipped for GP crisis

28 Aug 2019



The SNP is still ill-equipped for sorting out Scotland's GP crisis now and in the future, despite years of being warned about a range of challenges.

An Audit Scotland report on the Scottish Government's approach to primary care workforce planning described it as "fragmented", and warned the bid to attract a further 800 GPs would be tougher than the SNP realised.

'NHS workforce planning – part 2' warned that a third of GPs are over the age of 50, and changing working patterns meant more family doctors were working part-time.

As a result, auditors said: "For every GP that retires more than one will need to be trained and recruited to replace them."

The SNP's pledge to attract more than 800 GPs over the next decade also came under fire, with the report stating: "The Scottish Government has not set out what impact these additional GPs will have or how the target reflects retirement rates or changes in working patterns. It has not provided an assessment of how policy initiatives will contribute to reaching the target, or identified what the risks are if it is not achieved."

And because of the changing working patterns being adopted by GPs, the report said – even with an additional 800 GPs – current numbers could remain stable.

According to the document, a £15 million drive to recruit more GPs had resulted in an extra 39 GPs being hired.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"The GP crisis in Scotland has occurred on the SNP's watch, and things don't look like they're going to get any better.

"Doctors have been very clear that more than 800 new GPs will need to be recruited over the next decade just to stand still.

"But because of the SNP's shambolic workforce planning, even that might now not be enough.

"The nationalists have been warned repeatedly about workforce problems across the whole NHS for several years, from nurses and midwives to consultants and GPs.

"They have continually failed to act, and now patients and those NHS workers

left behind are being forced to suffer.

“That’s why Scottish Conservatives have launched our Save Our Surgeries campaign and we will put the family doctor back at the heart of our NHS.”