

SNP has union to thank after £1bn black hole exposed

18 Jul 2019



The SNP government is being bailed out by Westminster to the tune of more than £700 million after overseeing a slump in Scotland's economy.

It was confirmed today that tax revenues here were almost £1 billion less than expected in 2017/18, after the SNP embarked on making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

However, under a risk-sharing agreement, the UK Government will offset that shortfall by £737 million, meaning ministers in Holyrood still need to find more than £200 million to plug a hole in the Scottish budget.

The dip in tax receipts is due to Scotland's economy performing worse than the rest of the UK, with growth and productivity continuing to lag, as they have done continually since the SNP came to power.

And now that Scotland's budget is more heavily dependent on economic performance following the devolution of more powers, it means a black hole has emerged.

The nationalists will now have to fill that by hiking taxes again, slashing public services or increasing borrowing.

Incredibly, finance secretary Derek Mackay said the revelations showed that his SNP government needs more, not fewer, powers.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"It seems the more powers the SNP gets, the more of a mess it makes of Scotland's affairs.

"Yet Derek Mackay's excuse for these failings is that he needs even more controls.

"This exposes the cost of having an under-performing SNP government which is overseeing sluggish growth and poor productivity.

"Thanks to that incompetence, public services may have to be slashed to the tune of £200 million, or Scottish taxpayers will face even more raids on their pay packets.

"Delivering more powers to the Scottish Parliament should have been a huge opportunity for ministers to boost our economic fortunes. But instead, the SNP has squandered them.

“Fortunately, the benefits of being part of the UK mean that this underperformance by the SNP government can be compensated for by Westminster.

“Perhaps the SNP should acknowledge that and be thankful for the union, instead of trying to tear Scotland out of it.”E

[Drugs crisis needs a cross-party, cross-government summit](#)

17 Jul 2019



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for a cross-party summit on Scotland’s drug emergency, after figures yesterday revealed the country’s death rate is the highest in the developed world.

It is also supporting calls for the UK Government to attend the summit to ensure that both Scotland’s governments and all opposition parties are involved in debating action to combat the crisis.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said that the party would bring its own drug strategy to the table, released in November last year.

It calls for ministers to set a clear target to halve the number of drug deaths in Scotland over the next five years and increase the number of drug users accessing treatment to 60 per cent by:

- Allowing first time drug users to avoid a criminal record so long as they attend Local Commissions
- Creating an independent review of methadone
- A redesign of alcohol and drug services
- The redirection of funds into rehabilitation, recovery and abstinence
- More prison based interventions followed by transitional and long-term support for addicts
- Increased peer support, employability and education programmes
- A third sector led recovery taskforce

It comes after yesterday’s drug figures showed a total of 1187 deaths in 2018 – up 27 per cent from the previous year.

More than half of all deaths involved so-called “street drugs” like painkillers and Valium, a rise of 43 per cent.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Over the last decade, the Scottish Conservatives have a track record of

working across party divides to tackle Scotland's drug crisis.

"It's time we all rose to the challenge again, starting with a cross-party summit so we can begin a serious and detailed conversation about how to tackle this national emergency.

"With 1187 of our fellow Scots losing their lives to addiction last year the need for cross-party and inter-governmental discussions to find solutions is critical.

"This is a crisis that spans political divides, so we would hope that both Scottish and UK governments are involved.

"Our own proposals were spelled out in our Addictions Strategy: Life Plan launched last year, to halve the number of drug deaths in Scotland over the next five years.

"Rather than give first time offenders a criminal record, we think they should be asked to attend local 'commissions' and receive treatment, in order to stop their descent into the hell of drug dependency.

"We also want an independent review of the methadone programme, and more government support for services that help addicts into rehabilitation and recover services.

"So-called safe consumption rooms aren't the only answer here – what we need is a fresh approach that helps people to change and one which takes a holistic approach to addiction.

"The Scottish Conservatives have been warning ministers about the growing opioid crisis for some time. The situation in Scotland today is at crisis point.

"But there are also warning signs coming internationally – the opioid crisis which we see in the United States is a major warning sign and a call to action for us all.

"We need to act to make sure we are ahead of the curve if we are going to avoid seeing the development of an opioid crisis of similar levels in the future here in Scotland.

"What's now vital is that all parties make this national emergency a national priority.

"We can and must rise to the challenge."

Scotland's drug deaths now 3 times the UK rate

16 Jul 2019



The Scottish drugs death rate is now three times higher than the UK average – and has more than doubled on the SNP's watch.

Statistics released today have shown 1187 people died following drug use in 2018, a 27 per cent rise on the previous year.

It's the highest figure on record, and more than twice the rate of a decade ago.

The National Records of Scotland stated this means Scotland isn't just the worst in the UK, but has a higher mortality rate than the whole of Europe.

Methadone, the medication prescribed by the NHS to help heroin users, contributed to nearly half of all deaths, and featured more often than the drug it's meant to safely replace.

The SNP government immediately used the figures to call for the creation of a state-run heroin consumption room in Glasgow – the one measure it knows it isn't able to introduce.

That stance has been attacked by the Scottish Conservatives, who point out the nationalists have had sole control over health and justice for 12 years, yet has only worsened the drugs crisis.

The Scottish Conservatives last year set out a detailed strategy to cut drug deaths by half – proposing a “second chance” plan for drug users caught for the first time, a review of the SNP's controversial methadone programme, and new personalised “life plans” for every drug user to help them beat their addiction.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“The crisis in relation to drugs-related deaths in Scotland should now be a number one concern for this SNP government.

“On its watch, these fatalities – all of which are avoidable – have more than doubled since it came to power.

“The SNP has had control over health and justice for 12 years, yet hasn't managed to bring in anything that comes close to dealing with this problem.

“As these figures show, whatever drugs strategies it has adopted have only made things worse.

“Predictably, in their desperation, the nationalists are now pinning their hopes on consumption rooms, because they know it’s something the UK Government does not agree with.

“That’s a cowardly approach from those ministers who’re meant to be taking responsibility.

“Instead, they’re hiding behind a ruse.

“They should be focusing their efforts on rehabilitation and abstinence-based recovery, the very services they have cut to the bone.

“Over the last decade, the Scottish Government’s approach has been to park vulnerable users on methadone.

“Yet these figures show methadone now causes even more deaths than heroin.

“What more evidence do we need that this SNP government has failed every single one of these vulnerable people who’ve lost their lives to ruinous drug addiction.”

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs added:

“It is a shocking indictment of 20 years of failed drug and alcohol policies under Labour, Liberal Democrat and SNP governments that we see Scotland today now record the highest drug deaths anywhere in Europe.

“We need to see a new approach which firstly ends drug and alcohol partnerships being the Cinderella service in the NHS.

“We are the only party which has brought forward a radical new approach to redesign and invest in addiction services and rehabilitation across Scotland.

“That is why we want to see action now from SNP ministers to instigate a third sector-led review of all recovery services in Scotland, a review of the methadone programme, and new fast-track residential rehabilitation places.

“SNP ministers have taken the regressive decisions to cut alcohol and drug partnership budgets in the past which has resulted in the destabilisation of services across the country.

“It’s time for a radical new approach that gives people with addictions and their families hope.”

[The £250m cost of SNP’s botched IT](#)

projects

28 Jun 2019



The SNP's failure to properly implement public sector IT contracts has cost the taxpayer more than £250 million in recent years, new analysis has revealed.

Botched contracts across the police, health service and other quangos has led to the public purse having to write off a total of £257 million.

It follows revelations this week that the SNP government's pensions body will need £23 million in cash following to collapse of an IT deal with firm Capita.

The infamous fiasco with CAP payments for farmers saw costs balloon from £50 million to £129 million – costing taxpayers an additional £79 million.

The bungled process to sort out NHS 24's IT system saw a £75.8 million process turn into an expected £131 million – an extra £55.2 million.

And Police Scotland's new computer system has come in £100 million more than initially planned, now totalling £300 million.

More minor costs to public finances include and extra £440,000 for a Scottish Prison Service Procurement System; £120,000 on a Skills Development Scotland online scheme; and £150,000 in staff overtime costs for the chaos surrounding the CAP payments project for Scottish Government staff.

Scottish Conservative MSP Donald Cameron said:

“It would be unrealistic to expect every major IT project to be completed on time and on budget, especially when large organisations are involved.

“But the fact this series of blunders has cost the taxpayer more than £250 million shows just how negligent the SNP has been.

“Nationalist ministers have spent years pleading poverty – slashing public services and hiking taxes as a consequence.

“But a more competent approach to these schemes could have saved the taxpayer tens of millions of pounds, and spared some of the subsequent misery.

“The SNP cannot blame anyone else for this record of financial recklessness. It's been in charge for 12 years, and must take full responsibility.”

Sturgeon stands by plan to let tagged criminals off the hook

27 Jun 2019



Nicola Sturgeon has defended her own government's decision not to impose additional punishment on criminals who remove their electronic tags.

Despite pleas from victim support groups, the SNP this week rejected a Scottish Conservative plan to make tampering with a tag a specific offence resulting in stiffer punishment.

It comes as the Scottish Government plans to release more offenders into the community – wearing a tag instead of being sent to prison.

At First Minister's Questions today, Ruth Davidson pointed out there was no additional sanction on those who cut their ankle tag off.

Given their tag is a direct replacement for jail, the Scottish Conservative leader said, removing it is akin to "scaling the prison walls and making a run for it".

In relation to the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Bill, Scottish Women's Aid said: "To be a credible deterrent, breach of electronic monitoring condition must be an automatic criminal offence."

Victim Support Scotland added that such breaches had to be punished "to maintain the trust of victims and the community".

Despite that, today Ms Sturgeon said the bill would "make our country safer" and it was about "smarter justice".

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP wants to start emptying jails, letting criminals out on tags as a direct alternative to prison.

"That means removing the tag is the equivalent of an inmate scaling the prison walls and making a run for it.

"So quite why the SNP doesn't want to make this an automatic offence is staggering.

"Instead, a criminal who tampers with their electronic tag will get a nice letter asking them to please turn themselves in.

"That doesn't sound like justice to me, and victim charities back that up.

"Victims of crime are being let down by this needlessly soft-touch approach,

and the First Minister owes them an explanation.”