

[SNP flagship bank plans 'bankrolled' by UK Government](#)

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- SNP flagship bank plans 'bankrolled' by UK Government

11 Jan 2019



The SNP is stumping up less than a tenth of the cash for one of its own flagship policies, it has been revealed.

Finance secretary Derek Mackay confirmed that he'd be setting aside around £10 million towards the Scottish National Investment Bank, with the UK Government providing the remainder of the £130 million package.

He made the admission under questioning from shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart at a Holyrood committee this week.

Nicola Sturgeon revealed the plans to create the bank in her 2017/18 Programme for Government, and even appointed a leading Scottish banker to oversee the move.

She described it as a "hugely exciting development for Scotland", adding it would be the country's "cornerstone financial institution".

But it's now emerged that £120 million of the £130 million earmarked for the scheme within the SNP budget has come from the UK Treasury in the form of financial transactions funding.

Mr Mackay admitted: "£120 million is coming from the financial transactions and I have allocated a £10 million base operating cost."

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

"It's quite remarkable that the SNP is relying on the UK Government to fund one of its own flagship policies.

"The SNP hasn't been slow in hailing this initiative.

"But Derek Mackay seems reluctant to put his money where his mouth is.

"If nothing else, the nationalists should admit this is another benefit of Scotland being part of the UK, and acknowledge that this flagship scheme is being bankrolled by Westminster."

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10 Jan 2019



The Scottish Conservatives have cautiously welcomed the u-turn in funding for hill-farmers announced by Fergus Ewing today.

Earlier this week the Scottish Government published changes to funding for less favoured areas, which stated, "LFASS support will be retained at 80% in 2019 and 40% in 2020".

Speaking in a debate on future rural policy and support in Scotland, Mr Ewing partially reversed this position and instead announced that this funding will remain at 80% of the current level for both 2019 and 2020.

Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for the rural economy has welcomed this dramatic u-turn and stated that this goes some way to give hill-farmers some reassurance for the future.

Donald Cameron MSP, Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for the rural economy said:

"The Cabinet Secretary previously this week announced a cut to LFASS payments to 40% of current levels in 2020.

"He was well warned that this would have a catastrophic impact on Scotland's hill farmers and crofters.

"The Chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation, Russell Smith, said just yesterday that 'Reducing the Less Favoured Areas support to 80% of current rates for 2019 sends out a very negative message, but we can live with it but to then cut it to a mere 40% for 2020 will be ruinous.'

"In our amendment to today's motion for debate, the Scottish Conservatives highlighted the serious concern about these reductions to LFASS.

"So under intense pressure the Cabinet Secretary has today reversed his position and that is to be welcomed.

"Hillfarmers will still face a 20% cut over the next few years and that will have serious effects on farmers and crofters in less favoured areas.

“Going forward, the Cabinet Secretary must ensure that those farming on ‘less favourable’ land are properly supported.

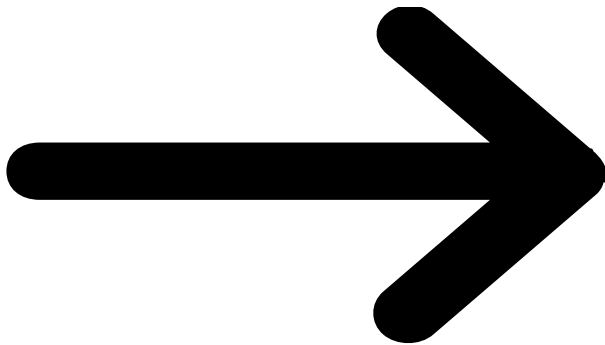
“Once again the SNP government has been dragged to a sensible funding position kicking and screaming.

“Scotland’s farmers deserve a Scottish government that recognises their importance and actively supports the future of hill farming.”

[Sturgeon drives ‘coach and horses’ through her previous Salmond probe claim](#)

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- Sturgeon drives ‘coach and horses’ through her previous Salmond probe claim

10 Jan 2019



Nicola Sturgeon has been accused of “driving a coach and horses” through her previous assertions a face-to-face meeting with Alex Salmond was non-governmental.

The First Minister admitted today that she was accompanied by her taxpayer-funded chief of staff during a summit with her predecessor over sexual harassment complaints against him.

This is despite, just two days ago, saying the series of meetings with Mr Salmond at her home in Glasgow were entirely party-related.

It deepens suspicions over Ms Sturgeon’s role in the process, casting doubt on her claims not to have been involved at any stage in the dispute between Mr Salmond and the Scottish Government.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said today's revelations strengthened the need for a Holyrood inquiry, and was at odds with Scottish Parliament codes of conduct in relation to the roles of government-employed special advisers.

He accused her of "an astonishing lapse in judgement on more than one occasion", adding that the two women at the heart of the complaints would feel let down by the fact Mr Salmond had "a series of private audiences" with the woman at the top of the very organisation they'd complained to.

Scottish Conservative interim leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"This astonishing admission from the First Minister drives a coach and horses through her assertion from earlier this week that she met Alex Salmond in purely a party capacity.

"If that was the case, what on earth was her number one advisor as First Minister doing there?

"The First Minister has shown an astounding lapse in judgement on more than one occasion.

"She should have severed all contact following the first meeting, but instead spoke with her predecessor on four further occasions about this matter.

"In effect, Alex Salmond has had a series of private audiences with the woman at the head of the very organisation that's supposed to be investigating him over sexual harassment complaints.

"The brave women who made these complaints would be forgiven for being appalled at this situation.

"There are also huge question marks over the attendance of a special adviser at such a meeting, when the code clearly states this should not happen.

"These revelations strengthen the need for a Scottish Parliament inquiry into this fiasco, and that's something all opposition parties should back."

[Scotland's 'lost generation' of teachers highlights retention problem](#)

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- Scotland's 'lost generation' of teachers highlights retention problem



Scotland's schools are currently experiencing a 'lost generation', as teachers between the ages of 43 and 60 are leaving the profession in droves, removing significant experience from schools and classrooms.

Figures collated by the Scottish Conservatives show that between 2004 and 2018 the number of teachers has fallen by almost 4,000.

However, while there are increases among most of the other age groups, the 43 to 60 year old age range has decreased by 12,896 over the same period, highlighting a dramatic loss of experience in schools.

This week the Scottish Conservatives will be focusing on the problems that continue to face Scottish schools, despite the SNP's claim that education is their 'number one priority.'

The statistics show that the number of 20-30 year old teachers have increased by over 3,000, and the number of 30 – 40 year old teachers have increased by 4848, since 2004.

Over the same period, the number of 51 year olds within the system has reduced by 1438.

The Scottish Conservatives are concerned that this exodus is removing significant teaching experience from the classroom and from other, newer teachers. It also highlights a profound retention issue.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said;

"These statistics are deeply worrying in terms of the numbers of the most experienced teachers leaving the profession and leaving it early.

"Most worrying are the high numbers leaving in their early fifties when, in previous generations, there was a much higher rate of retention.

"It is this retention issue which is as much a concern as the fall in the number of teachers in our schools which has taken place while the SNP has been in power.

"There are some encouraging signs of increased recruitment in the younger years but that does not compensate for the huge loss of older and more experienced teachers.

"This loss ties in with the difficulties of recruiting heads and deputy heads – something that is worrying both local authorities and the teaching unions.

"There is a clear need for the SNP to investigate why older teachers are leaving the profession, and taking with them much needed experience, and tackle this growing problem.

"So much for Nicola Sturgeon's top priority.

"The SNP must reduce the burdens on teachers and focus on retaining more of

these teachers which would in itself tackle the current teacher deficit.”

[Supermarkets should create ‘local produce’ aisles](#)

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- Supermarkets should create ‘local produce’ aisles

5 Jan 2019



Supermarkets should be encouraged to create specific shelves or aisles for produce generated in their local area, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

With the support of government, major retailers would be able to point customers to fresh food and drink made locally, supporting nearby smaller firms in the process.

The party’s wellbeing and sport spokesman Brian Whittle said it would be a straightforward enough change for supermarkets to make, expanding options for customers and encouraging healthier consumption.

He said some shops already had specified aisles and sections for food from certain parts of the world, and that a “local produce” aisle could operate alongside those.

The plans will be included in future Scottish Conservative blueprints for boosting smaller firms and improving the health of the nation through healthier eating.

Scottish Conservative wellbeing and sport spokesman Brian Whittle said:

“Most major supermarkets have sections showcasing food from around the world, so there’s no reason why this can’t be replicated specifically for local produce.

“It would signpost people to where they can get food and drink made in their local area, which will be popular among those passionate about supporting small, local businesses.

“The relationship between major supermarkets and local firms hasn’t always been great, but this presents an opportunity to improve that.

“And if shoppers aren’t keen on this and want to continue as normal, they can just walk straight past.

“For smaller producers who might struggle to meet the demands of a nationwide contract, this would be a chance to build lasting relationships with major retailers.

“A local produce aisle would also give consumers the opportunity to support local firms without losing the convenience of being able to buy a wide range of products under one roof.

“We know Scots’ diets need to improve, and buying fresh, local produce is an important way of doing that.

“With some government support and the goodwill of major retailers, there’s no reason why this cannot become a reality.”