

Providers blast SNP childcare expansion plans

31 Oct 2018



Providers have blasted SNP plans to expand free childcare, warning businesses could be forced to close and parents will have less choice as a result.

A consultation into the increasing of funded childcare entitlement was published today, exposing concerns from those within the industry.

Fewer than half of those who responded to the Scottish Government document said the changes would “increase choice for parents and carers”.

And the report stated: “There was also a concern among respondents that the National Standard and the still-to-be determined funding rate may lead to some providers pulling out of the market and that this could eventually decrease the choice for parents.”

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has consistently set out her intention to increase free childcare entitlement from 600 hours to 1140 hours per year by August 2020.

But the Scottish Conservatives said that commitment is looking more like another empty SNP promise.

Private nurseries have already warned they could go out of business because the process is poorly planned, and that the SNP did not properly consider the additional costs involved.

The party added that parents should be able to access their free hours of childcare wherever and whenever they wanted, and that the current plans need to be more flexible to cater for modern working patterns.

Scottish Conservative early years spokeswoman Alison Harris said:

“The SNP’s pledge to increase free childcare is looking increasingly like another empty promise.

“It’s another example of Nicola Sturgeon making some grand claims, but her government failing to put the necessary work into ensuring it happens.

“Responses to this consultation show exactly what providers think of these changes, and how realistic they are.

“This botched expansion is a mess of the nationalists’ own making.

“It has to be sorted out as a matter of urgency or nurseries will be driven out of business, and parents relying on this policy will be left facing a

major struggle.”

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The Scottish Conservatives are urging the SNP to spend the extra roads cash they will receive from the UK Budget, this financial year, purely on fixing potholes.

The Barnett consequentials from the recent UK Budget include £41m for local roads maintenance this financial year.

The Scottish Conservatives are therefore asking that the SNP spends the additional money, in its entirety, to improve the dreadful state of Scotland’s roads.

The Scottish Conservatives have previously called for a ‘Pothole Fund’ that Scottish local authorities could bid for and use the cash to repair potholes across the country.

Indeed, recent statistics suggest that more than a quarter of the country’s roads are in an unsatisfactory state.

Local authorities have paid out over £2million in pothole compensation claims to motorists over the last ten years, while maintenance funding for roads has been reduced by 20 per cent since 2011.

Jamie Greene, Scottish Conservative Transport Spokesman said:

“The SNP has failed to maintain our roads, complaining instead that they have not received enough money to do so.

“This additional money means the SNP has absolutely no excuses any more, this extra money is available now.

“Well maintained roads are essential for everyone and the current state of our roads is disgraceful.

“The SNP’s failure to maintain our roads properly is endangering public

safety and slowing our economy.

“The SNP must now use this extra money from the UK Budget now, and enable local authorities to improve the roads, through the Pothole Fund, this year.”

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The Chancellor can deliver a Budget for two of Scotland's key industries, oil and whisky, by guaranteeing a stable tax regime for them both, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The oil and whisky industries both support thousands of jobs across Scotland directly and indirectly. With the backing of the UK Government, they have been able to invest in infrastructure projects and create skilled jobs throughout Scotland and the UK.

The future for both industries is bright. A recent report from Aberdeen University on the North Sea oil has predicted that 17 billion barrels of oil equivalent are still to be extracted from the North Sea, while figures for the first half of this year on Scotch whisky show exports have increased in value by 10.8% to £1.97 billion compared with the same period in 2017.

The Scottish Conservatives have been making a positive case to the Treasury for continued support for these key sectors which will deliver on Scotland's priorities. This week Scottish Conservative MPs John Lamont and Douglas Ross reiterated the case for Scotch whisky by writing to the Chancellor.

Commenting MP for Moray, Douglas Ross said:

“The number of Scotch whisky distilleries in Moray represents more than 40% of all Scotch distilleries, they are a vital employer in the area and bring a huge boost in tourism.

“Scotch whisky is world renowned and an export powerhouse. The thriving

industry brings many economic benefits to rural communities not just in Moray but the whole of Scotland.

“Thanks to the Conservative spirit duty freeze in previous years it has only gone from strength to strength, my Scottish Conservatives colleagues are determined to see this continue.”

Commenting MP for Aberdeen South, Ross Thomson said:

“The Conservative UK Government has taken unprecedented action to support the Oil and Gas sector over the years. This cannot be said for the SNP Scottish Government.

“UK Government policy has resulted in the oil and gas tax regime being one of the most generous in the world, but we need the stability and predictability to continue to help sustain this vital industry. It will protect jobs and investment.

“Scottish Conservatives have raised the profile of the industry at the highest levels of government and made the case for fiscal stability above all else. We hope the outcome on Monday will be a positive one.”

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Nicola Sturgeon is being urged this week to put in place a clear long-term plan for Scotland’s NHS – with the UK budget set to smash the scaremongering claims she made prior to the Independence referendum.

Tomorrow’s Commons statement by the Chancellor is expected to confirm a £20 billion boost for the NHS across the UK – with an extra £2 billion dedicated for Scotland by 2022.

The Scottish Conservatives are today calling on the SNP to guarantee every penny goes to health and social care in order to help tackle the deficiencies outlined by last week’s damning Audit Scotland report.

The party is also calling on the SNP to admit claims they made during the

referendum campaign – when they claimed the NHS would be hit by “hugely damaging cuts” have been proven to be false.

And setting out their own plans, the party is calling for the SNP to put the NHS Scotland on a secure long-term footing by boosting spending on GP services, rooting out inefficiencies, shifting more spending towards preventative care, and boosting cancer treatment.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Four years ago, Nicola Sturgeon tried to scare people into voting for independence by claiming a No vote would lead to cuts to our NHS. It was scaremongering then, and it’s now proven to be nonsense.

“The First Minister loves to preach to others about the false claims made in referendums – perhaps this week she should admit to her own.

“As health chiefs south of the border have made clear, tomorrow’s Budget deal will put the NHS on a firm footing, so we can improve care for patients over the long term. We now need the SNP to show the same ambition.

“As Health Secretary, it was Nicola Sturgeon herself who cut the number of training places for nurses and midwives in Scotland. That spectacular error of judgement has created the workforce crisis in Scotland that see a shortage of over 3,200 nurses and midwives in our NHS today.

“Every penny the SNP receives this week in extra NHS spending should go on health and care in Scotland. We need to see more of our funding going to support GPs on the front line. We need to see improvements to cancer treatment and it is time to cut the waste and inefficiency that is stopping doctors and nurses from getting on with their jobs.

“The NHS in Scotland has a bright future. The SNP has run out of excuses. Let’s see Nicola Sturgeon set out a plan not a grievance for once.”

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The Tay Cities Deal is an opportunity to improve rural broadband, Scottish Conservative MPs Kirstene Hair and Luke Graham have said.

Ms Hair and Mr Graham's respective constituencies have some of the worst broadband speeds in Scotland. The Scottish Government have been responsible for the roll-out of broadband and continually missed their own targets. An Audit Scotland report, Superfast broadband for Scotland further progress, has stated it is unlikely the Scottish Government will reach their 100% of R-100. This has left rural parts of the Tay Cities region without sufficient broadband speeds.

The UK Government have committed the next round of funding to go directly to local authorities in Scotland instead of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Conservative MPs are calling for broadband funding to be included in the Tay Cities Deal to help speed up the roll-out to rural areas.

Commenting MP for Angus Kirstene Hair said:

"A decent broadband connection is not a luxury but a necessity for both personal and business use. In Angus we have a large number of rural businesses – not just in farming – but across a spectrum of industries. In order for these to thrive, they require an acceptable broadband speed.

"Rural areas have lost faith in the Scottish Government to deliver on their promise of R100 by 2021. It has got to the stage that the Scottish Government are in fact holding back rural areas which is why I believe the Tay Cities Deal is an opportunity for the UK government to step in and fix this SNP failure.

"I cannot overestimate the economic boost which would come to the area with the correct broadband infrastructure in place and hope our intervention will support the real needs of our rural communities whilst the SNP continue to focus on the central belt."

Adding the Luke Graham, MP for Ochil and South Perthshire said:

"So many of our villages and small communities fall into the small percentage that are excluded from government broadband schemes. There is a real risk of rural communities being left behind and put at a disadvantage compared to those living in urban areas.

"It is unacceptable that people are missing out on the digital revolution because of where they live. Funding for rural broadband in the Tay Cities Deal will help address this issue and ensure our rural economy can be as vibrant as the urban economy."